THE #1 SCREEN SHOCKER OF THE YEAR!

BY JACK MARTIN

HALLOWEEN III



A JOHN CARPENTER/DEBRA HILL PRODUCTION

HALLOWEEN II

It is Halloween night in Haddonfield, Illinois. Six gunshots pierce the silence of this normally quiet town. Neighborhood kids trick-or-treating on the street stare as a man plunges off a balcony. A doctor from the county mental hospital rushes from the house. He has followed his patient, who escaped from the institution, back to Haddonfield, where fifteen years earlier he brutally murdered his own sister. The demented young man has already killed three teenagers this evening. Tonight's massacre has only begun!



Based on the screenplay by
John Carpenter and Debra Hill



ZEBRA BOOKS
KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP.

ZEBRA BOOKS

are published by

KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP.
475 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10016



ISBN: 0-89083-864-X

Printed in the United States of America

to
Errol Undercliffe

Black cats and goblins
And broomsticks and ghosts
Covens of witches
With all of their hosts
You may think they scare me
You're probably right
Black cats and goblins
On Halloween night!

—Children's Rhyme

Facilis descensus Averno;
Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;
Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est.

(The descent to Avernus is easy; the gate of Pluto stands open night and day; but to retrace one's steps and return to the upper air, that is the toil, that the difficulty.)

—Virgil


HALLOWEEN II

Prologue

It was that time of year when the days are short and the shadows are long. When the earth tilts still further on its axis and the seasons hang suspended between autumn and winter; when the very light seems to change and colors deepen mysteriously . . .

You know what it is like.

The morning sun arcs away across the sky, the afternoon rushes impatiently toward dusk, the cutting edge of darkness like the blade of a sundial pointed and turning under eaves and porches. A time of dampness and slow, flaking rust, of barking dogs that are never seen, of creaking lampposts and pale neon signs, of telephone lines that crackle as if underwater. Of distant traffic and the laughter of children fading behind you and in front of you all at once; of the broken moon drifting like a gauze-covered face. Of the dripping condensation in chattering drainpipes, of the clutching of wings in the roofs of mouldering garages. Of frost on glass; of moist, endless coughs. Of mildewed gloves and too-thin socks, of soft newspapers and food that is never hot, of litter dropped in gutters melting into paste, of laundry wilting before it can be folded away, of labels buckling from jars in the musty cupboard and of your own white breathing, alone at midnight, glazing the window and then slipping out through the screen to meet the cold steam settling in the flowerbeds below . . .

It was the thirty-first of October in Haddonfield, Illinois.

It was late. Very late.

Once again, it was Halloween.

THE NIGHT HE CAME HOME

CHAPTER

One

There was a shape in the bushes.

Which is not surprising, since the dead walked in Haddonfield that night. This is a fact; the dead walked. Also witches and bone-white skeletons, vampires and ghouls and assorted lesser demons, including a four-foot-tall version of the Devil himself.

The Devil was first seen on Lampkin Lane, stumbling a bit as he led a straggly line of pirates with cutlasses clanking, red kerchiefs tied to their heads and patches strung over bloodshot eyes, treasure bags held open in their dirty hands as if they had only recently been called back from watery graves to claim the booty that was rightfully theirs. The Devil raised a sticky finger and pointed to an old wood-frame house in the middle of the block.

"Mrs. Elrod!" said the Devil.

"Yeah!" said the pirates.

The shape in the bushes watched as the ragged line of ghouls gathered under a large oak tree. The shape breathed hoarsely and pressed forward, threatening to leave its cover of waving branches.

Then a sword was raised by one of the pirates, glistening silver in the light of the mercury streetlamps, pointing the way to the Elrods' front door.

The shape drew back, blending into the pattern of leaves.

"Trick or treat!" cried the Devil. "*Smell my feet! Give me something good to eat!"*

The Elrods' yellow porchlight snapped on, already smeared with the powder of mothwings and aswarm now with the sudden clicking of countless flying insects.

Mrs. Elrod's voice could be heard above the dragging of seven-league boots over the creaking boards of the porch, the weary scuffling around the sagging screen door.

"Why, my Lord, what are you coming to *my* house for?"

"Nyaahh!" said a witch.

"Boo!" said a ghost.

"Trick or treat!" said the Devil.

"Well, I never," said Mrs. Elrod. She was a stout woman in her late

sixties, with a pink bathrobe and a rheumy twinkling in her eyes. She looked as if she had just stepped out onto the moors to see a monster approaching fast on decomposing legs. It now fell to her to do something, she did not know what, with this information. “Harold!” she called. “Come here!”

“Hurry up,” said the Devil, “Mrs. Elrod, please, I gotta go home and go to the bathroom!”

“Here, Tracy Cronenberg, is that you?”

“Nyaahh!”

“And Adam and Noah and Andy . . . what a surprise! Yes sir, an absolute trick-or-treat surprise, that’s what it is. But it’s late! You should be home in bed. Do you know what time it is? Do your mothers know where you are?”

“Candy!” said a demon.

“Bubblegum!” said a witch. “The kind with pictures inside!”

“It so happens I have a few sugar cookies left in the kitchen. I baked plenty, just in case. I was about to sit down in front of the television with Mr. Elrod and eat the rest of them myself.”

“No!”

“Well, now, you wait here and I’ll go see what I can scare up.” Mrs. Elrod winked and went back into the house.

Across the tree-lined street the shape waited, breathing heavily.

Mrs. Elrod reappeared.

“Oh, children, I don’t know what to say. Can you imagine? Mr. Elrod ate up all of my—all of *our*—cookies!”

“Aww . . . !”

“Hold your horses, now.” The old woman produced a small coin purse from under her apron. She opened it and counted. “You all line up, and I’ll give you each something to take home. Don’t lose it. And tomorrow morning, bright and early, you can go down to Stoddard’s Store and buy yourself something special! Won’t that be nice?”

She dropped silver coins into their bags until her purse was empty.

“Yayyy!”

“Thank you, Mrs. Elrod!”

“See you next year, Mrs. Elrod!”

“Boo!”

The pirates and demons and ghouls scattered from the porch.

Mrs. Elrod turned her coin purse upside down, shook her head and smiled. “They shouldn’t be out on the streets alone,” she said to no one in particular. Then, “Harold? They’re still coming, can you believe it? Harold?”

She clicked off her yellow porchlight and withdrew into her house.

On the other side of the street, the shape was cloaked in darkness once more.

An October wind arose from nowhere, stirring up crisp dust devils in the old leaves, parting the trees and the fullness of the bushes long enough to reveal the black outline standing there, broad and still as a statue.

A statue of a man, his face pale and his eyes burning.

The man was waiting.

He waited as the pirates and goblins and witches and vampires and ghouls and the Devil himself rounded the corner in a laughing chain and disappeared in the night. Their cries grew fainter and finally were lost in the swishing of the trees.

Still he waited.

For he had not yet found the One he was looking for.

Up and down the block trees moved in the wind, their topmost leaves tipped with blue-white phosphor from the overhead streetlights, their trunks thick and black and glistening like malignant tubers. The lower branches of the oak across the street were tinted through with an unsteady orange glow, the Elrods' pumpkin set out on a side windowsill and guttering low now in the drafts. Leaves moved like a fall of dark coins across the glowing eyes and mouth, fragmenting the jack-o'-lantern into a shifting, disembodied face, a crookedly grinning witness to the last of Haddonfield's wandering bands of Halloween beggars.

Or were they the last?

For even now a flickering passed along the block, rushing past other pumpkins set out on the porches and in the windows of a dozen other houses between here and the corner. The carved faces' glowing eyes winked out one by one as something—someone?—crossed the lawns at a rapid pace, coming this way.

Wait.

It was more than one. The orange skulls blacked out one after another, marking the passage of low, hunched silhouettes heading toward the Elrod house once, twice, three times. Three figures, moving fast. Coming closer.

They crossed the street. Coming this way.

They were not going to the Elrods', after all. They were coming here, to what had once been the old Myers house.

To the bushes.

Behind which a man was waiting.

Waiting for them?

They made it across the damp street, gathered together there on the cracked sidewalk. Not ten feet away.

The Myers house, set back from the street on a piebald plot of dead grass, was utterly dark. Not so much as the glow of a TV set or the feeble suggestion of a ghostly nightlight or even the forgotten pilot flame of a heater or kitchen range disturbed the impenetrable, tomb-like dimness beyond the coated windows.

It was a house whose residents had long since abandoned it, like rats from a sinking ship, with no new owner forthcoming in all these years to take over the weeding and the painting and the repairing of rusty hinges and broken glass. It was to all appearances a structure designed on the backlot of a Hollywood movie studio, built by art directors and maintained as the classic model of a haunted house for no other reason than to scare little children and teenaged girls and others who had not entirely grown up and put such childish things safely behind them. Once it had known flowers and curtains and the busy slamming of doors; but now it was a forgotten relic, a peeling façade ignored by neighbors and passed by in daylight with a shudder, eyes averted, as if hoping would make it go away forever.

The shape in the bushes raised a thick hand, parted the shrubbery, and pressed its face forward.

A few feet away toes scuffed the sidewalk, rubber masks were lifted, sweat was wiped from wide-eyed faces.

"This is it, Lonnie," said a boy's voice.

"So?"

"So go inside," said a third voice, "like you said."

"Unless you're chicken."

"I'm not chicken," said Lonnie.

"Bullshit."

"I'm not, Richie!"

"Do it, then. Make him do it, Keith."

The shape squinted, peering intently.

Richie, Keith and Lonnie: three boys caught in that no man's land of eleven-to-thirteen, hovering somewhere between boyhood and adolescence, circling in an endless holding pattern and waiting impatiently for clearance to touch down.

They were too old for games and trick-or-treat candy, too young for girls and six-packs. Now, tonight, instead of staying home with popcorn and parents and six hours of horror movies on the Dr. Dementia Show, bored and sad at the same time, though none dared admit it, they had reluctantly donned last year's masks (but no

costumes, that's kids' stuff) and spent the night hanging out on the fringes of doorbell ringing and window soaping and holiday noisemaking, neither a part of it nor apart from it, until even they, sixth-graders though they were, knew it was past time to be home and with a good excuse, too. So that finally, here, left to their own devices, they had contrived a last rite of passage before the season was lost to them forever and the long test of winter would begin in earnest.

"I'm not chicken."

"Then go in."

The boy Lonnie hesitated. Then he laid a hand on the weathered front gate. It swung open with a screak, gaping wide on an overgrown walkway that led to a drooping porch.

The shape in the bushes watched this.

Lonnie passed into shadow and reappeared ahead without a sound from his sneakers to give him away. The porch, the house and the dimness within awaited his next move. Patiently. Almost invitingly.

"Go on, Lon!"

"I'm going."

"Chicken."

"Am not!"

The shape maneuvered to a new position behind the bushes.

"LON-NIE . . . !"

"Who said that?"

Three pairs of eyes searched the yard frantically, settling on the misshapen hedge.

From behind the hedge and bushes a deep, deep, very deep voice said again:

"HEY, LONNIE . . . GET YOUR ASS AWAY FROM THERE!"

Lonnie dove from the porch, scrabbled up and hurtled through the gate. Then the other boys were barreling from the yard, racing away in three different directions as fast as their legs would carry them. Running. Growing smaller in the distance. Gone.

The man behind the hedge stood up to his full height and stepped forward from his hiding place, his features outlined now by fugitive light from a nearby streetlamp.

He was smiling grimly.

A bald man with tough, polished skin and close-set eyes like the eyes of a cat, always alert but busy gazing beyond, past surfaces and old configurations for something which might come into range at any moment. He turned up his collar, stuffed his hands into his pockets, and continued to face the street.

Waiting.

Three of them saved, he thought, at least for the time being. But, God help me, I can't save them all.

Around him the Illinois night was filled with portents, just beyond the edge of hearing and the borderland of a now-familiar treetop skyline. To his left a cricket resumed its sawing chirrup from somewhere deep within the hedge; to his right a parked car, its windows beaded and sweating coldly, masked a rectangle of dry pavement the length and breadth of a grave alongside the curb. Above his head the stars shone down, wheeling in silent orbit about the indifferent eye of the moon.

It was, he thought, the perfect night for a sacrifice.

No wonder he chose Hallowmas, the man thought. The last night of the year, according to his calendar.

It certainly seemed that tonight, with the bright, talking tongues of fire within the graven pumpkin heads about to lick their last and enter the final darkness. They would have been better off left dying on the vine and replenishing the earth, instead of being ripped up and slashed into crescent skulls for his glorification. A circle of worshippers, thought the man. That's what he wants. A coven. A crowd. A world of them, an inferno of split, burning skulls grinning to honor him in a blazing rictus of death and destruction.

Even they weren't enough, fifteen years ago. He demanded other, more knowing obeisance, cries of agony as he called living flesh to the long winter of that-which-was-never-born—it must have been music to his ears. If he even heard them as he spilled their blood at his pagan feet.

Damn him to Hell! thought the man. That is his just reward. Only let me be here when it happens. Let me be present when he returns to his earthly home to dance on the graves of the dead. I know his perversion now, and I will be waiting. This time I will be ready.

The man fingered cold steel in his trenchcoat pocket.

I'll be here, no matter how long it takes. I defy him to show his obscene face once more to the world of the living. So that I can blow him into a thousand putrid pieces and scatter those pieces on the four winds. For even Lord Samhain is bound for the present into his human form. If you cut him, does he not bleed? You're damned right he does. I'll rip his death-eating heart into pulp with a load of burning lead . . .

I should have done it long ago. If I had had the guts.

I'll be here, he thought.

Try to get back, you Prince of Scum. You'll have to go through me first. I don't need a car to track you down. You took it—well, keep it. I

know where you are driving even now. I *know*. Which is why I can afford to let you come to me.

I should have finished the job the first time I saw you. You were still impersonating a child then. I should have torn your heart out with my bare hands and stuffed it down your fucking throat. I should have carved out your eyes like one of your miserable pumpkins and fed them to your rotten face, read you your future from your stinking entrails. Tonight your only future is an eternity of non-being from which you'll never return again. It would have been easier. But you won't get past me now.

This time it ends here.

He paced to the next yard, his footsteps echoing hollowly, his eyes blind with hatred and shame.

He hefted the .357 magnum in his pocket, feeling the reassuring balance of it. On this night, he thought, it will be the instrument of your mortal baptism. With this gun I christen thee Michael Bloody Myers of Evil Incarnate, in the name of your father who art in Hell. May damnation be your lot forever, darkness without end, amen, till time itself is done.

He saw the street, the corner with its stoplight buzzing like a trapped insect; the next block of houses, only a few with candlelit pumpkins still strobing to ward off evil spirits—what a cruel joke! If only they knew; porchlights blinking off for another night as he watched, the last night of the traditional harvest year, the night that would soon belong to the righteous on All Souls' Day.

He saw block after block of signal lights pulsing in unison, like a string of yellow eyes seen through a tunnel. He saw the hissing high-voltage lines strung like spidersilk over the nightscape, the shapes in the hedges that might have been him but were not, the dropped candy wrappers dotting the lawns, the rainbow pools of dark water in the gutters, reflecting the stars like distortion lenses. He saw it all, every detail, as if it were a time exposure photograph which if studied closely might offer a clue to his whereabouts. He saw all this and more, everything that was in front of him and to the right and to the left.

But he did not have eyes in the back of his head.

He did not see the pair of gloved hands that reached out from nowhere and clamped onto his shoulders.

He whirled around, bringing up the barrel of the gun beneath his coat.

A man in a Sheriff's uniform.

It was Brackett. He lowered his gun and tried to slow his heart from

stopping his throat.

"You all right, Loomis?" said the Sheriff.

"Yeah." He wanted to sound as matter-of-fact as possible. If Brackett knew what was really at stake in Haddonfield tonight he might . . . well, he might not believe it. He might think it was a joke, another holiday prank. He would laugh it off. And then it truly would be too late. Too late for us all. He straightened his collar and made a herculean effort at self-control.

"Nothing's goin' on," announced Sheriff Brackett. "Except kids playin' pranks, trick-or-treating, parking, getting high. I have the feeling you're way off on this."

He sounded like he was reading off a yellow sheet of the night's crimes. Is that all this is to him? thought Loomis. Another misdemeanor for the report?

"You have the wrong feeling," said Loomis.

"Well, you're not doing much to prove me wrong." The Sheriff rocked smugly on his heels.

"What more do you need?"

They walked. Brackett shone his flashlight at a twisted shape under a tree. It turned out to be a kid's bicycle.

"It's gonna take more than fancy talk to keep me up all night crawlin' around these bushes."

Loomis felt it coming. It was for him a statement of fact, deduced from observations made in proper scientific fashion over a long, very long period of time. Fifteen years to the day. To the night. The conclusion was inevitable. Even if this petty civil servant couldn't see it. His patience expired precisely then, strung out beyond the breaking point of human endurance. As of this minute he no longer cared if the Sheriff thought him mad. They'll all go down with him, he thought, if he's too blind to see. Lift the scales from his eyes before it's too late.

I've got to try.

"I watched him for fifteen years," Loomis began. "Sitting in a room, staring at a wall. Not seeing the wall. Looking past the wall, looking at this night. Inhumanly patient. Waiting for some secret, silent alarm to trigger him off. *Death has come to your little town, Sheriff*. You can either ignore it, or you can help me to stop it."

There. That was the reality. Now what was the Sheriff going to do about it?

Brackett wouldn't look him in the eye. "More fancy talk," he said simply, as if that, too, was a crime in his little black book, to be dealt with and dismissed as easily as a slight case of smalltown vandalism; less than that. A moment's indigestion, the residue of a bad dream

that would fade to nothingness in the reassuring light of day a few hours from now. The Sheriff was clearly a man who had no truck with matters he could not reduce to a few marks on a booking slip.

Loomis became quietly enraged at this man's, this town's small-mindedness.

What would it take to wake them to the danger? Two more hacked-up bodies like the ones in 1963? The continuing carefully-plotted, methodical destruction of the entire population? Of the Sheriff's own children? Even they can't be as pathetically stupid as this man, this keeper of law and order, this low-potential over-achiever, to use the current lexicon. The children, thought Loomis. Even they know to run for cover when pure, unadulterated evil brushes too close to them in the dark.

"Doctor, do you know what Haddonfield is?" The Sheriff continued in his flat bureaucrat's voice, convinced of the viability of ignorance as a means of survival. "Families. Children. All lined up in rows, up and down these streets. You're telling me they're lined up for a slaughterhouse."

A fitting metaphor for a midwesterner, thought the doctor. Never expect more than a grunt from a pig. That's as much as he can conceive of, God help him. God help us all.

But, as a matter of fact, he may not be that far wrong.

"They could be," said Loomis.

The Sheriff hiked up his belt with its jangling weaponry and clenched his jaw muscles. He narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips. He scanned the street effortlessly, as if examining the back of his hand, making no conscious note of it; its condition had not changed in so long he was certain it never would. He thrust his chin out and bit down, making a decision. It was clearly not an easy decision for him. But it was based on the concept of chain of command, the hierarchy of authority which he had sanctified in his own mind the day he first put on the uniform. He extended himself now beyond the call of duty and reluctantly gave the last measure of his loyalty to orders from above. That and no more.

"I'll stay with you tonight, doctor, just on that chance that you're right. And if you are—" And this was the kicker, his vague threat should common sense prevail in the morning, as he had no doubt it would. "—If you are right, *damn you for letting him out*."

With that the Sheriff turned away, crossed the street at a fast clip, and headed back to his car.

Loomis did not watch him go.

He had more important matters to worry about.

The hands on his watch turned and the night grew colder.

Loomis waited through the waning of the moon, the last trickling of water in dammed-up storm drains, the barking and then the bored silence of dogs, the winding down of crickets and the settling into sleep of the first houses on this block and the next as leaves fell over roofs and mist occluded windows. He even heard muffled choruses of snoring now from bedrooms shuttered on alleys. Cats abandoned their nocturnal prowling, cars ticked into cold iron in locked garages, lawns became dewy and recorded the footprints of his soundless passing. Minutes became hours, hours crept along on the falling scythes of his watch hands, and still he waited.

As the night pressed toward ten o'clock in this small town, he was wide awake.

Suddenly he tensed.

His ears were picking up—something. Not the swishing of the wind in the trees nor any other aspect of the street so familiar to him by now. His ears fine-tuned, zeroing in on the new sound . . .

The sound of automobile tires rolling too slowly over slippery pavement.

Probably it meant nothing. A teenaged couple on their way to lovers' lane, a family outing with kids asleep in the back seat, a businessman returning from drinks with his after-hours secretary. A police car, perhaps, if Brackett had kept his word and sent a back-up squad car on the prowl, after all.

But how could he be sure?

Loomis stood stock-still beside a brick house. A car drifted past on the uneven street.

It was not a police car. The driver was veiled in shadow, as if there were no one behind the wheel.

Loomis focused his eyes.

A station wagon.

And there. On the driver's door. A design, a circle containing a familiar emblem.The state seal.

It was the car, the same official station wagon Loomis himself had driven to the sanitarium—was it only last night? The car he had been given to transport Michael Myers to his hearing before the judge. There had been no danger of parole; Thorazine and Myers' own unearthly silence guaranteed that each time the case came up for review.

Except that last night Myers had made his move.

Unbelievably, he had tricked the guards and freed himself from maximum security. When Loomis and the nurse arrived, he was ready.

He overpowered them and took the car. Just like that. And all without a word.

Of course.

He could have done it at any time.

Except that he had been waiting. Waiting for that night.

It was a mistake that would not happen again.

I was right the first time, thought Loomis. There's no one behind the wheel. No one human, at least.

He drove the car straight here to Haddonfield, as I knew he would. No one would believe me, but I knew it would happen sooner or later. *I knew*.

Just as I know now what I must do to finish it.

He gripped the revolver in his pocket and began running across lawns, pacing the car.

The station wagon cornered. Loomis followed. It turned again, accelerated, leaving him behind.

Had it seen him?

Loomis sincerely hoped so.

He poised at the corner, listening. He opened his senses and his memory, admitting to his consciousness all that he had learned about Myers. And again, he knew.

Loomis did not have to reason further.

The remainder of the night would run true to Myers' inevitable plan. It was as clear as water on the air.

He would escape.

He would come home.

That much had already happened.

And now Loomis knew beyond the shadow of a doubt the single, murderous obsession that would control Michael Myers' every move until it was time for it to be over.

He would kill again.

Unless he could be stopped.

With a strangely calm, almost doomed sense of purpose, Dr. Loomis plunged across the intersection in a full run, tracking his patient.

CHAPTER

Two

Brackett, he thought, where are you when you're needed?

He stood by the station wagon. He had found it here, empty, had spent the last half-hour searching the yards and surrounding area.

There was no place to hide, and yet *he* was hiding. Somewhere. Very close by. Loomis could feel it. Waiting to strike and move on.

And all the while time was passing. Too much time.

To hell with you and your tired schedule, Sheriff, he thought. Your normal methods won't work tonight. Not anymore.

Loomis unpocketed his gun, opened the cylinder, held it to the moon and spun the chambers. Loaded.

It was all he needed to know.

He left the station wagon and started out again on his own.

After several blocks a pair of saucer-eyed headlights knifed abruptly out of an alley and caught him square in the face. He held up his hand.

The car braked. Brackett got out. Slowly. Almost casually.

"Where were you?" said Brackett disinterestedly. "I went back to the Myers house—"

"I found the car. He's here."

"Where?" Brackett's voice tightened.

"Three bloeks down. Get in the car," Loomis ordered. There was no time to reason. "Go up that side street and then back down here. Keep watching. I'm going ahead."

Brackett swallowed hard and dropped his cigarette.

A moment later he was swinging wide in a U-turn.

Loomis kept walking.

He was close now. He could all but smell it, taste it. There was an aura in the town, hanging like a cloud over the ordinary lives that played out in these ordered streets and houses, safe and sane lives that knew nothing of the chaos that might erupt at any second and blow their safe harbor out of the water. He did not envy them their complacency. Enjoy your haven while you can, he thought. It may not last much longer.

Lined up for a slaughterhouse. Brackett had said that. The Sheriff did not know how right he was. Is that what you all want to be—lambs to the slaughter?

Wake up! he thought.

I should scream bloody murder at the top of my lungs. Would that startle you out of your warm beds and into action?

No. You would only think it another Halloween jape, the final ritual of a holiday that long ago lost its meaning. A child's game made of nothing more substantial than colored paper and bobbing apples and cardboard broomsticks.

Except that the one who's playing the game tonight is no child.

And to him, it is no game.

Loomis came to another street. A peaceful, tree-lined lane filled with more classic two-story houses and old oaks. It was no different from any other street in this section of town.

He paused under a grove of trees strung with crêpe paper, streamers blowing in the wind. He noted the corner, getting his bearings.

It was a wide street with close-cropped lawns and well-kept yards. Tidy and conservative.

Loomis was not reassured.

Now a last echo of Halloween play sounded from one of the yards. Squealing laughter. It lifted on the night air and rose over the housetops, to be lost on the rushing autumn wind.

The sound set his teeth on edge.

Nothing seemed simple or normal to him anymore. He tried to hold the irrational side of his nature in check, but it was no use. In terms of what he knew now, the wailing might as easily have been the keening of banshees. Where was the distinction?

Just then a little boy came running from the porch of a house on the other side of the street. A late trick-or-treater, thought Loomis. But, really, where was the dividing line between ritual and reality, between costumed playacting and genuine monsters? Was the difference only in how seriously one played the game? Take that litile tyke, for instance. He's running like he believes the gates of Hades have really opened behind him, tripping over his costume, his face smeared with makeup. His wailing certainly seems genuine enough. Who's to say it isn't true? Do I know what he has seen? Does anyone? It's real to him. We should all be so easily convinced. Perhaps it would increase our potential for survival.

His wailing . . .

Loomis frowned.

The little boy wasn't laughing. He was crying. He was beyond tears.

Someone must have played a particularly frightful joke on him. And his costume—

It wasn't a costume. The child was in his pajamas.

And his face. It wasn't a mask and it wasn't makeup. It was smeared with—what?

Could it be blood?

Loomis stiffened.

He heard more crying—screaming—above the sudden pounding of the pulse in his ears.

A little girl with dark hair flying came running behind the boy. Was she chasing him? No. Fear contorted her face into an expression of sheer horror. She was too terrified even to glance back over her shoulder at whatever she was running from.

Loomis had not seen such an expression in years. Not since the police photographs of the faces of the two victims who were slashed to death fifteen years ago. In this very town.

Only a few blocks away.

Now the two children were tearing across the lawn, the sidewalk, slapping dark outlines of their tiny feet on the pavement.

Loomis took quick steps.

The children spotted him but kept running, screaming even louder. They passed him, trying desperately to grab hands but pulling apart as their toes scraped cement.

They were running for their lives.

"Help!" they shrieked. "Help, mister! The bogy man . . . !"

"Keep going!" shouted Loomis. "Don't stop and don't look back, no matter what you see or hear!"

"He's in the house! He's—"

"Get your asses out of here!" Loomis yelled.

The house. Not the old Myers house this time. Not his old stomping grounds. Another house, apparently one picked at random.

Why?

Because, thought Loomis, there's no one left to kill in the Myers house. *He has to seek new blood.*

Why didn't I think of that?

Loomis sprinted full out across the lawn.

Before he got to the porch he heard more screaming. Inside. Upstairs.

The door stood open on darkness. He kicked it back and jumped inside.

His eyes were already attuned to the dark. He raised the gun and braced his arm with his other hand. He crouched and swung his body in a half-circle, sweeping the room, straight-arming the gun from side to side in front of him.

The old light fixture in the ceiling creaked, vibrating.

The sounds of a struggle upstairs.

The metallic smell of blood in the air.

There. At the top of the landing. Legs, ankles moving in a spastic dance. Feet lifting off the floor. Squirming, kicking.

Dragged away down the hall.

Loomis mounted the stairs two at a time. He flattened against the wall.

A girl, a teenaged girl was dangling at the end of the landing. She was held around the throat by two huge white hands. The hands were attached to the heavy, muscular arms of a tall, very tall shape wearing a mask.

It was him!

Loomis aimed. He couldn't get a clear shot. The girl—she could no longer scream. She was reaching up, clawing at the pale death's-head in front of her in a last mad spasm. As Loomis watched, the rubber mask wrinkled and slid up under her fingernails.

The shape let go of her just long enough to pull the mask back down. Then the head tilted to one side, observing. Like an animal. Curious. Utterly detached.

The girl's mouth opened and she screamed again. It was a scream that curdled Loomis' blood, a scream of someone who at that instant might have wished she had never been born.

Loomis cocked the hammer with both thumbs and sighted at the mask. It had been raised only an instant, but long enough to reveal the inconceivably bland, emotionless features of a face free of any feeling, a creature so devoid of any recognizable human expression that it was capable of absolutely anything. It could as easily tear the arms and legs from a human being as from a fly, with no inner restraints, conscience, guilt. No hesitation. No consideration of the consequences, and no remorse. *No conscience*. A perfect killing machine, a pure and simple alien ego devoted entirely to its own subhuman purposes. It had not been born of man and woman—through them, but not of them. An imposter in humanlike form, a simulacrum catapulted here across generations of evolution from the dawn of prehistory to subvert and destroy the accomplishments of an entire species.

I will not have it! thought Loomis savagely. In the name of my own kind and all that we have come to stand for, I send you back to the

darkness from which you were spawned. You go to Hell, Michael Myers, or whatever your name really is!

Now!

Without hesitation, Loomis pulled the trigger.

There was a sound like thunder in the closed hallway.

The bullet struck the shape in the chest and knocked it off its feet.

The girl fell back to the wall. Loomis started toward her, one hand extended.

"It's—" *all right now*, he started to say. The shape sat up.

It got to its feet. As if it had not been shot at all.

He took point-blank aim and squeezed off two more rounds. The explosions were so loud they might have been a single shot.

The moment was slowed-down, dreamlike. Loomis saw the slugs slam into the chest. Each shot knocked the shape back farther on the landing, holding it at bay. But only temporarily each time, as it regained its footing and kept coming.

Loomis braced his back against the wall and pumped off three more shots, rapid-fire, straight into the chest, until the gun clicked in his hands.

As each shot hit, the shape was driven back toward the second story balcony, freezing the scene in stages like flashes of lightning. The empty chambers clicked and clicked. As the shape jerked backwards and over the balcony railing, Loomis clicked the trigger again. Through smoke from the muzzle he saw the shape fall backwards through space and into the darkness outside. A long second later, he heard the thud of the body hitting the ground.

Then there was only the sound of the girl whimpering against the wall.

Loomis lowered his trembling arms. His lips curled back over his teeth.

It was over.

The adrenalin pounded in his body. His knees unlocked and he went to her, bending over her, his kidneys throbbing with pain.

She was flecked with blood—her own. The sleeve was torn away from her blouse, revealing a long, clotted gash like lips in her white skin. Her face . . . she was young, no more than sixteen or seventeen. She might have been much younger; the way her face was distorted she could almost have been a child in grade school. She was not crying. She was sobbing, broken. The effect was pathetic. Loomis felt his heart wrench. He started to reach out to comfort her, thought better of it.

He sat down next to her.

At the end of the landing, droplets of dark blood reflected moonlight.

Loomis massaged his arm. It felt sprained, nearly crippled from the recoil of the revolver. The gun metal was hot in his hand. He set it down. He felt no satisfaction in the moment. Only a numb relief.

The girl's sobbing continued. Go ahead, he thought. Just be sure you're weeping for yourself and not for him. Spill the tears he never shed; spill it like his black blood.

Half-formed words were struggling in her throat.

Don't, he almost said. Words mean nothing now. They never have. All my words were not enough, down the days and years of therapy. A game, that's all they were, a poor way to try to deal with the reality of his presence in our midst. Words fail me even now. They were not enough when it counted and they will never be enough again.

"Was it . . . the bogy man?" managed the girl in a pitiful child's voice.

He had to watch her mouth and listen closely. The echo of the gunshots still clogged his ears.

Loomis took a long time answering. Trying to find the right words. Words that would mean anything at all. Finally they came to him with great effort, as if he were being reeducated to their use.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "it was."

The girl went on sobbing. His words neither frightened nor comforted her. She was past that. She had seen the face of Evil up close, and she would never be the same.

A shot of morphine, he thought. That's what she needs. Obliteration, total and complete, for as long as she needs it, until forgetfulness can do its merciful work and allow her to heal. If it's not already too late for her.

He forced himself up and went to the balcony.

He cupped his palms over the sides of his head and popped his ears. The wind swelled the trees but he could not hear it. If a police siren or ambulance was on its way he could not hear that, either. Someone will have heard, he thought. The shots were like cannonfire. Unless the good neighbors on this block have been sleeping the sleep of the dead.

His eyes took in the grass below.

Let me hold this last picture of him in my mind forever, he thought, for the longest day that I live. Whenever I am afraid, whenever anyone is afraid, I will be able to dredge it up from memory and be assured that he and the evil he represents are no more.

The balcony. The flower trellis. The grass below, where he had fallen.

The lawn.

Which was empty.

He slapped the wall with his hand.

Turned. Grabbed the gun and staggered down the stairs. Out the door. Into the yard. He dropped to his knees there.

A patch of flattened, wet grass which still held the outline of a body. It looked as if it had been burned into the ground.

He reached out, feeling the compressed blades of grass against his skin. The grass was smooth when you rubbed it in one direction, rough the other. It was wetter in the center. Very wet.

Wet with blood.

Loomis drew away from it and stood, staring wildly around the yard. The waving branches. The smudges that were garden tools around the periphery. The sky, and the night. Nothing else.

A porch light winked on at the house next door.

A man in nightclothes leaned into the darkness, shading his eyes, peering out between two grinning pumpkins on his porch.

"Just what is going on out there?"

"Call the police," said Loomis reflexively. "Tell the Sheriff I've shot him."

"Who?"

Loomis' throat cleared and he found the full strength of his voice. "Tell him that he's still loose!"

The man clutched his pajamas and swayed uncertainly. "Is this some kind of joke? I've been trick-or-treated to death tonight."

Loomis held to the gun, the empty gun.

This is it, he thought. I should have guessed.

Halloween is over. The games. The roles. The cheap thrills.

Now it really begins.

"You don't know what death is," he said.

He was on his way out of the yard.

A HOLIDAY BURNING

CHAPTER

Three

A Haddonfield blue-and-white screeched to a halt in the middle of the block, as a group of late trick-or-treaters ducked into an alley. They were four: a witch, a ghost, a ghoul, and a pint-sized version of the Devil. They giggled and hid in the shadows, watching.

Loomis ran to the car. His coattails flapped behind his like wings.

"I shot him six times!"

"Wh-a-at?" groaned Brackett skeptically as he climbed out. But he had his shotgun cradled in the crook of his arm just in case.

"I said, I shot him six times," repeated Loomis. His hands jerked in the air, trying to describe what had happened.

It was absurd, he knew that. But so was the universe. Logic was a tool for dealing with only a small part of reality. Still the question remained: how to persuade a nickel-and-dime constable while there was time, with anything less than a cram course in metaphysics? He was at a loss. He felt like a child again, trying to convince his father that there was good reason to be afraid of the dark.

He heard his own voice ringing in his ears, the hollow tone of it, and came close to giving up. Let me have the shotgun, he thought. And the car. I'll find him. It will take too long to explain.

But all he could say was, "I—I shot him in the heart and—"

"He can't have gotten very far. Come on."

"I shot him six—" Face it, Dad, he thought. Or have you never heard of quantum physics, the Heisenberg principle, the porridge bird that lays its egg in the air? No, of course not. There are more things in Heaven and Earth . . . do you think your ignorance prevents them from being true? Do you even think? What *will* you understand? "Brackett, he's not human!"

Brackett's face screwed up as though someone had told him that his underage daughter had just eloped with the town hebephrenic. What would happen next would be one silly-assed piece of business for a grown man to put up with, he was surely thinking. *But, shit, it has to be done. It's the law*.

The law, thought Loomis. That's what I'll hit him with. It's his religion. He's hung up on it the way an addict depends on his heroin. I'll—

Brackett saw the smoking gun still clenched tightly in Loomis' hand.

That did it.

A moment later the car doors slammed and they were burning rubber.

The four trick-or-treaters waited until the flashing red lights of the police car were gone. Then they continued cautiously along the alley.

They made their way past a rotting picket fence, bent trash cans, bundles of cut branches tied like the ends of witches' brooms. One of them stepped down too hard, spitting gravel under his shoe like BB shot against one of the cans.

"Shh!"

"Careful!"

"Are you sure this is the short-cut . . . ?"

A dog barked suddenly and gnashed the air, straining its chain.

"This ain't the way! Come on . . ."

They turned and dashed off in another direction.

The dog relaxed and gave out a last growl as the alley was silent again.

Almost silent.

Its ears pricked up and swept the alley like radar.

A tall, very tall trick-or-treater emerged from the shadows.

The dog barked furiously.

The tall shape sidestepped into a yard and did not move again until the barking dog lost interest.

The yard was overgrown and uneven, mined with mounds of garden-variety refuse and discards. An old refrigerator tilted there like a white tombstone, a rusting lawn mower propped against a shed, sections of garden hose coiled and rotting in the spiked grass, beneath stiff flags of laundry left out and forgotten on the line.

A house. A warm, orange light in the kitchen window.

The tall shape moved toward it.

"Harold, you want mayonnaise on your sandwich?"

The voice projected clearly through the window, around a fat pumpkin perched on the sill.

It was Mrs. Elrod, she of the sugar cookies and pale eyes.

The shape came closer.

There was no response to Mrs. Elrod's question. She did not look up but finished carving a thick slab of ham on the drainboard. The pumpkin reflected in the carton of Coke bottles on her counter, six orange circles burning in the glass necks, transforming each into a

flickering, tapered candle. She put down her Ginsu knife and reached for another jar. “How about mustard?” Still no response.

The shape waited, blocked from her view by the jack-o’-lantern. The flame burned lower, the carved, slitted eyes squeezing closed to the yard and the night outside, the top of the pumpkin and its length of withered umbilical vine sinking and beginning to char like a blackened fuse.

“Harold?”

She *tsked* and dragged her slippered feet across the kitchen floor.

The living room was dark except for a strobing blue television screen. She put a tired hand to the door frame and steadied herself as her eyes adjusted.

There was Mr. Elrod, slumped in his lowboy chair before the TV. His head and shoulders were outlined against the screen, where just now the image of an American flag fluttered in grainy black-and-white. There were words superimposed over the flag, the last of the titles for this latest movie in Dr. Dementia’s Six Hour Horror Movie Marathon. She squinted. DIRECTED BY . . . somebody. The lettering threatened to break up into snow on the small screen. G-E-O-R-G-E R-O-M-E-R-O. Whoever that was.

She made out the image of her husband much more clearly now. The mussed hair, the wrinkled roll of his pajama collar under his bathrobe.

“Harold, are you asleep again?” She started toward him. The screen went blank.

She stopped. She reached out for the back of the chair.

The screen brightened.

Now the face of a local news reporter lit up the room. Beside him at his news desk, a pumpkin grinned broadly.

“THIS IS A WWAR NEWSBREAK. HERE IS ROBERT MUNDY, REPORTING LIVE FROM THE SCENE . . .”

Mrs. Elrod folded her robe closed around her throat, as if feeling a sudden draft in the house.

The scene switched to remote coverage. “MOMENTS AGO POLICE INFORMED US THAT MICHAEL MYERS, WHO FLED LAST NIGHT FROM THE SMITH’S GROVE-WARREN COUNTY SANITARIUM, IS UNFORTUNATELY TIED IN WITH AN ATTACK ON A YOUNG WOMAN . . .”

“Oh, Lord,” whispered Mrs. Elrod. “It’s that Myers boy again, I knew it!”

Around her the house settled, heavy leaves fell on the roof, the refrigerator creaked like the opening and closing of a screen door.

“REPEATING FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO JUST TUNED IN. THE STATE POLICE HAVE ISSUED AN ALL POINTS BULLETIN FOR MICHAEL MYERS, A MENTAL PATIENT WHO ESCAPED LAST NIGHT FROM THE SMITH’S GROVE-WARREN COUNTY SANITARIUM. HE IS NOW BELIEVED TO BE AT LARGE IN HADDONFIELD.”

She shrank back into the kitchen, where things were bright and clear. Mr. Elrod had slept through the announcement.

“THIS IS ROBERT MUNDY, RETURNING YOU TO . . .”

The reporter’s voice and face broke up into static.

She felt around her for balance within familiar surroundings. She continued to stare dumbly into the living room as the horror movie, now in progress, flicked back up on the screen. Her pale eyes became watery. She could not have seen the television image: a parched graveyard, the stones tilted, the ragged, wiry figure of a man in black closing the distance across bleak graves with spastic, sleep-walking movements. She crossed herself.

“. . . Hey, I mean, praying for church, huh?”

The voice on the TV was speaking in a sarcastic tone. Then cheap music droned, muffling the dialogue.

Mrs. Elrod reached for the unfinished ham sandwich. She would get back to her job and forget what she had just heard. Try to forget it.

Her plump fingers found the bread, the meat. At last she forced herself to turn away from the receding image of the living room, her husband sleeping safely there. She hoped he had not heard any of it.

Now there was work to be done.

Her hand slid off the cutting board.

She looked down.

There was a spill on the board. It might have been strawberry jam, except that it was too runny. She held her fingertips to her face. Some kind of syrup or—

It was peculiar. The way it was on the ham, too.

She made an effort to concentrate on what was in front of her. It was not mustard. It was not mayonnaise. It was not anything she used for sandwiches. It was the wrong color. Darker, even, than her robe. Much darker. It was gluey and red and . . .

Mrs. Elrod screamed. She reached blindly for the knife she had been using.

Which was no longer there.

Next door to the Elrods’, a telephone rang.

The dog was barking.

In fact all the dogs on the block were barking. It spread like a contagion, gaining in volume, a warning signal that quickly became a chorus of mad, guttural barks.

It was Halloween, of course.

And yet there had been no firecrackers, no rattling trash cans, no giggling children to start the barking this time.

Was that a siren that passed quickly and faded in the distance?

A young woman came out onto her porch.

“Mr. Elrod?”

That only made the dogs bark louder. She couldn’t hear. It had been a siren or—

“Mrs. Elrod?” She stopped halfway down the wooden steps to the back yard. “Are you okay?”

The dogs quieted, as if uninterested in the sound of her voice. Whatever had alerted them had passed by.

The blankets left to air out on the Elrods’ clothesline flapped in the breeze. She rubbed her arms and shuddered. Unseen crickets took up their singing again in the bushes, sounding the uncertain boundaries of the yard.

She went back inside, the whites of her eyes showing.

She picked up the phone in the dining room. “Hi.”

“What’s wrong?”

“There was someone screaming next door.”

“What?”

“Yeah. Mr. and Mrs. Elrod’s. It’s his wife’s always picking on him. He probably got angry and decided to start beating her.” She said it cooly, as if describing an everyday occurrence, but gooseflesh rose on her arms.

“God, I hate nights like this.” The voice was hollow in the phone lines. It was coming from only a few blocks away, but in that short distance it gained a false electronic vibrato. “You know it’s the full moon?”

“No kiddin’?”

“No. Your folks home?”

“They,” she announced, a self-indulgent smile curling her lips, “are gone.” She straightened her white blouse in the dining room mirror, tried tucking it into her jeans. “My dad had to take my Aunt Ruby to Hardin County and my mother decided to go along.” Idly she picked up a carving knife left from dinner and examined it without really seeing it. Almost fondling it.

“Did you hear?”

"Hear about what?"

"This girl got killed in Haddonfield. It was on the radio."

"Hold on." She set down the knife, turned on the radio.

". . . THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF AT LEAST ONE VIOLENT ATTACK TONIGHT BY THE ESCAPED MENTAL PATIENT. A TEENAGE GIRL WAS FOUND MINUTES AGO IN THE UPSTAIRS OF A HADDONFIELD RESIDENCE . . ."

"I can't believe it," said the girl.

She glanced warily at the windows, but they were black as the night except for the detached reflection of a Halloween pumpkin's mordant grin, floating suspended in the shiny darkness.

"I know," came the voice on the telephone.

"You know, we prob'ly knew her?"

"Where did it happen?"

"Down on Orange Grove."

"That's right down the street!"

"I *know!"*

"Sally, I can hear the sirens coming. Do they know who it was?"

"No . . ."

The boards in the front room floor creaked.

She jerked around nervously. The sirens, the dogs barking, howling like wolves . . .

The glass panes in the window over the sink shivered, trembling like membranes. The reflection of a pumpkin appeared to swell unrecognizably, then dissembled into twin circles that resembled animal eyes, watching her. She blinked and rubbed her face. The glass subsided into flat panes. Her own breathing came back to her magnified in the mouthpiece. She tapped the receiver with her nails. She yanked her shirttails out of her jeans again, watching the mirror image of herself posing in the glass.

Something was still not right.

There was a thump behind her, in the living room.

"Oh, God," she said.

She dropped the phone.

She went to the dim archway that opened on the living room. She glanced back uncertainly at the telephone, its coiled cord dangling.

She looked ahead into the living room, where only a plastic pumpkin was clearly visible. The front door stood open. "Who is it?"

She left the phone and took a step, two steps into the other room.

She stopped. Nothing moved. The pumpkin light wavered on the

walls. Expanding, contracting.

There was a breathing in the room that was not her own.

She closed the collar of her blouse around her neck and cleared her throat.

"Is anybody . . . ?" she began.

Before she could finish her voice was cut off. The words bubbled in her mouth, below the startled whites of her eyes and above the clean white cotton of her shirtfront, which was suddenly splashed with tiny red polka dots. The cut came swiftly from behind, clean and deep and straight across, so that the blood shot out in all directions from the extra mouth that now opened below her chin, spattering her face and eyelashes and hair as well as her white shirt with a hissing, pumping spray that covered several feet of carpet and furniture before the shape released her and let her sink down to the floor. It stood over her with its head cocked to the side like a dog's, its flat, dead eyes unblinking behind the pale and featureless Halloween mask.

Then it stepped over her body and through the door.

Her lips were still twitching, trying to form a scream.

"Circle the block again."

"How long now?" Sheriff Brackett pulled the wheel hand-over-hand and the squad ear squealed around another corner. In the green light from under the dashboard his face was stony and reptilian.

Loomis checked his watch with eyes that shone fiercely in the unnatural light.

"It's about thirty minutes." His head tugged to one side. "Put the light there. There, by those trees."

Braekett obliged with his hand-held spotlight. The beam swept the front of a house, a tree strung with a roll of toilet paper. "There's nothing."

"Well, keep going." Loomis sucked in his breath and suppressed what he wanted to say.

"You know, doctor," said Braekett tightly, "I'm just about there."

Loomis shot an impatient glance at him. "What?"

"The point where I stop takin' orders from you.

Was that a threat? I don't have time to play games with him, thought Loomis. Let him think what he likes.

Loomis dropped open the chamber of the gun and began reloading.

"All right, Sheriff. Whatever you want. The primary concern is that we stop him."

"You let him out."

It was an accusation. So that was his game—assigning the responsibility. Of course. Let him, thought Loomis, if that will ease his mind. If that's what keeps him going.

"I didn't," said Loomis automatically.

"His own God damn doctor."

"I didn't . . . let him out." My pride made me say that, thought Loomis. I'm letting him play on my guilt. Why? What does it matter what this man thinks of me?

Loomis jumped several inches as the two-way radio squawked. Brackett snatched up the microphone.

"Who is it?"

Static.

"Say again. What is it?"

The voice on the other end cleared as they passed under high-voltage wires. "*Hunt.*"

"Where are you?"

"Out by the bakery . . . moving north on Scottsville Road . . ."

"Get the hell back into town. Come up 17th Street and meet me at the bypass."

As Brackett hung up, Loomis swung the gun closed. Brackett turned on him.

"Will you put that thing away?"

Loomis held the gun and stared out the window.

"You couldn't have shot him six times," Brackett informed him.

"You think I'm lying, Sheriff." It was not a question.

"I think you missed him. No man could take six slugs."

Loomis bristled in spite of himself. "I'm telling you this isn't a man."

Brackett's expression changed to open derision. His thin lips opened to speak. His eyes left the road.

"Look out!" Loomis all but reached over to jog the wheel. "Slow down!"

"What?" said Brackett.

"All right, over there! Look look *look!"*

It was hard to make out through the clear half-circles in the windshield. Four trick-or-treaters. Brackett sighed.

Loomis waved his finger.

There. Farther up the sidewalk, emerging from under a streetlamp.

A tall figure in black. With a pale, almost featureless Halloween mask over his head. Walking steadily a few yards behind the children. Patiently. Tracking them.

Brackett took his foot off the gas. “Is it him?”

“I don’t know!”

Loomis leaped from the car. “Get back!” he yelled to the children.

They looked at him and giggled.

“Run!” shouted Loomis. “Come on, RUN!”

“Loomis!” called the Sheriff angrily.

“Get back!” He kicked the children past him and spread his legs in a defensive stance.

“Loomis!” shouted the Sheriff as the pistol was raised.

Loomis heard the car brakes, the slamming of the door, running feet. He refused to take his eyes from the tall shape. Two of the children were now safely past him, but the other two—he couldn’t get a clear shot!

And now the shape turned in its tracks and started walking away in the opposite direction.

Loomis cocked the gun. “Stop!”

“Loomis!”

The tall shape crossed the street.

The Sheriff came running as Loomis stepped into the street. The black-coated figure blended into the shadows. There, a flash of pale rubber skin, the grotesque tuft of colorless hair sewn to the top, the deliberate, unstoppable gait—

Loomis braced himself in the middle of the street. He was getting away!

“Don’t shoot!” yelled Brackett.

There was something else moving on the other side of the street. Was it children? An onlooker? Loomis hesitated, afraid he might miss. The shape kept walking. Loomis turned further, drew a bead on the exact center of the head—

Before he could squeeze the trigger, he was blinded. Bright white lights flared into his eyes. Through glare he saw the shape, still walking.

A car finished its turn. At the last instant its headlights swept the figure in black. The car swerved, braked. Too late.

It was a patrol car.

With an ear-splitting screech like a thousand fingernails scraping over a blackboard, the car scooped the shape up onto its hood and continued to brake, skidded, and ploughed headlong into a line of parked cars. There was the smell of burning rubber, and then sparks shooting upwards like a corona around the collison. The sharp scent of gasoline. And then the bursting roar of the explosion.

Loomis staggered back in the force of the shock waves, his skin and the gun in his hand suddenly reflecting bright orange as a fireball rolled into the sky. Then black smoke and the crackle of flames.

From within the car, a scream. Then a deputy kicked open a door and lurched out. His uniform was smoking.

Loomis watched Brackett run to the figure trapped between the cars, but it was too late. The burning became a blast furnace, forcing Brackett back in its terrible light.

Loomis stood transfixed as the tall shape burned black, trapped between the cars.

He didn't make a sound, thought Loomis. He never has.

Even as it burned, it remained upright.

It might have been held that way between the smashed bumpers. But Loomis knew better.

"He—he came outa nowhere," gasped the deputy. "I couldn't stop."

"Was it him?"

It burned to a crisp, popping and sizzling as the mask melted away to reveal the glowing skull beneath. It burned until there was nothing left but a twisted scarecrow, its arms fiery matchsticks. Still Loomis watched. His face, flushed and sweating in the heat of the conflagration, never changed from its expression of grim, humorless satisfaction.

He lowered the gun. It swung hot and heavy against his leg. Then a wind caught the flames and the smell blew over him. He turned aside and retched.

"WAS IT HIM OR NOT?" shouted Brackett.

Loomis did not bother to answer. This is the moment, he thought, that I have been waiting for. Nothing else matters.

Another patrol car roared up. Another deputy rushed to join them."Leigh!"

"You're too late, Hunt."

Brackett stared with Loomis at the carnage. Loomis felt contemptuous eyes on him.

"Leigh," patrolman Hunt tried again, "they've found three bodies."

"Where?" Brackett spun around.

"Across the street from the Doyle house." Hunt's voice broke. "Three kids."

Brackett spat in Loomis' direction.

The patrolman waited. "Leigh," he said. His voice was hesitant, almost kind. "Leigh, *one of them was Annie . . . !"*

Before Hunt could say anything else, Brackett ran to the patrol car

and slammed the door. The patrolman followed and got in next to this Sheriff.

Loomis went for the back seat.

It wasn't over yet. The fallout from tonight would last a long time. Perhaps for the rest of his—of all of their lives. There were the survivors to worry about. For them it would never be over. And those who didn't survive . . . it would not make the rest of the night easy; there would be a lot of stories to tell, lives to unravel. Perhaps even the burden of some new patients, now. Maybe even someone like Brackett. The more rigid the personality the more complete the break. It happened that way sometimes. He did not look forward to it. But he wanted to know it all. He considered it his personal responsibility.

As they sped away, Loomis gazed numbly out the back window. The four children in trick-or-treat costumes were huddled together, watching animatedly.

It should be a moment of celebration, he thought. If it were spring this would make a wonderful Feast of Beltane.

But it was too late. Far too late.

CHAPTER

Four

Several blocks away, an ambulance screamed up to the Doyle house.

Inside, Laurie heard it. She concentrated on it.

She was trying to keep the dream from coming.

Then hands were lifting her from where she lay on the second floor. She could not feel them. She had not felt anything since the first knife slash across her shoulder; through that special grace by which the human nervous system survives times of great crisis, she had been granted the gift of non-feeling. It was this absence of pain which now kept her from passing out.

She knew the crisis was over.

She had seen *him* driven away from her and off the second story balcony by a burst of gunfire, louder than anything she had ever heard before. He had fallen—finally in a hail of bullets. She had actually seen them tear into his chest, the gouts of blood squeezing out . . . It was over.

Why, then, couldn't she feel anything now?

It *was* over, wasn't it?

"Don't let them put me to sleep," she said.

She realized what she was saying. She *knew*. More than the ambulance attendants, more even than the tall policemen. Some part of her knew the real truth, even if she could not make sense of it.

And still the dream tried to come.

"It's okay, miss."

Eyes were watching her. Curious neighbors, vaguely-familiar faces rubbernecking as she was carried down the steps.

Now I know what it's like to be on a stretcher, she thought. I always figured it would be peaceful. Nothing to worry about, doctors to take care of you. Only it's not.

Did she see *his* eyes there, just there, at the edge of the crowd?

Voices: "Where's Brackett?"

"Brackett'll take care of it."

"Where *is* he?"

"All right, folks, let's give 'em room, please . . ."

“Don’t let them . . .” she said.

“Okay. It’s okay.”

She tried to sit up but the straps held her, just under her breasts. The blanket that covered her body was bleeding through in red splotches. No, it was only the reflection of those goofy spinning light bulbs on top of the police cars.

She felt herself dropping, then rising as the gurney legs scissored open under her. She heard what sounded like drips of blood as wheels clicked over the pavement. The stars circled above her. Then the doors of the ambulance opened and she was shunted inside. The doors shut and now she could hear only the idling of the motor through the steel compartment. She wanted to reach out and steady herself as the ambulance started to move. But her arms wouldn’t work right. They were held to her sides. It was like being buried alive.

Her mouth worked thickly, though she couldn’t feel her lips. “Don’t let them put me to sleep.”

“It’s okay it’s okay it’s okay . . .”

“Don’t let them. Promise!”

“I promise. Now try to get some rest.”

A young man sat down next to her, over her. He had on a blue jacket with a white patch. A name was stitched there in blue thread. JIMMY.

“T-talk, to me, Jimmy,” she said weakly. Her voice sounded hollow in her ears, as though she were in a cave.

“What do you want to talk about?”

She concentrated on his face. It would help her to keep from passing out. It was a good face with nice features. He had curly black hair. She held to him with her eyes. His face was real, with so much expression. A sensitive face. Like Ben Tramer, a little. Not like—

“I don’t know. Just don’t let them—don’t let me—”

“Nobody’s going to hurt you.”

“Don’t leave me. I mean, can you stay with me wherever they’re going to . . . ?”

He was her age. Or older. Maybe eighteen or nineteen. She wanted to think only of him, of what she could see in front of her right now. Not—other things. He must have graduated already, she thought. I never saw him before. I don’t think I did. I would have noticed.

The ambulance yawed and the gurney rolled a few inches, then locked into place. Jimmy put out a hand to hold it steady.

Behind her head the voice of the driver: “Hey, you know this chick?”

“Yeah. Her name’s Laurie Strode.” Jimmy’s voice. She wondered if the driver knew she could hear them. Probably he didn’t care. But somebody cared. Jimmy cared. She tried to keep that thought. “She goes to school with my little brother Ziggy.”

“Her old man, uh, Strode Realty?”

“Yeah.”

“O-kay. That means old Bud don’t let up on the hammer!”

The ambulance accelerated.

“Don’t worry,” said Jimmy. “He does the same for all the girls.” He was grinning manfully.

“I’m not worried about that. Just don’t let them put me to sleep . . . !”

The siren started up.

It jolted her. She felt it tingle through her body like an electric shock. With it came pain. Pain she could feel. Needles-and-pins. Memory returned to her, too. It started to wash over her in waves like her pulse. Like the dream. Trying to get inside her.

“Oh . . . !” she said.

“Don’t think about it,” he said. He meant the way her body felt. He didn’t understand.

Or did he? Maybe that was the best advice he could give. What I need to hear. Don’t think about any of it. What happened tonight, and the other, before. *Don’t think*.

“Okay,” she said.

She trusted him.

The siren screamed.

Outside the ambulance flashing lights that swam past like phosphorescent fish, then darkness again, overlaid with a filtered color that is found nowhere in nature: the sodium vapor lights of the hospital parking lot.

No one touched her. Only the stretcher. The doors of the van opened like metal wings.

She raised her head a few inches as they lowered the gurney and wheeled her toward the EMERGENCY entrance. Beyond the yellow blanket over her toes she saw red lights blinking like drops of luminous blood in the glass doors. But they were only reflections from atop the ambulance.

She knew she had to remain conscious.

To her left the dark, polished tops of cars parked under the HADDONFIELD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL sign. To her right a ’57 Chevy.

Next to the Chevy, a dark car door opened and a shape emerged.

She tensed.

But it was only a pirate. *Only a pirate?* she thought. Yes. Why not? It was Halloween.

I guess anything is possible tonight.

There shouldn't be such a thing as Halloween. It's bad for the kids—evil. They don't know that. They think the same as I did. They think it's fun. I'll tell them the truth when I get out of here. I'll make them listen. I should have remembered. I should have—

But she didn't want to remember. Not now.

She wasn't ready for it.

The pirate got out of the dark car and leaned on the '57 Chevy. He had a red bandana around his head. And a towel. He was holding a towel to his face.

"Okay, just—just get out easy," Laurie heard a woman saying. The pirate's mother.

"It'll be okay. Just walk slow, okay?"

The towel fell away from the boy's face. Tears were streaming down his cheeks and blood was percolating out of his open mouth.

"All right? You okay, hon? God, oh God!" The mother's face twisted as she walked him slowly forward. "Here, just-just-just put it up there, real gently. Just walk real slow. Come on . . ."

The little boy was led forward. He was hunched over like an old man. See? thought Laurie. Look what Halloween did to him.

Then her stretcher was wheeled ahead and up the ramp.

Inside, the emergency receiving room was bright and reassuring. There was nothing in here that didn't show, Laurie was sure. The lights made her head ache. She forced her eyes to stay open.

The doors closed behind her.

"Jill, where's Dr. Mixter?" snapped Jimmy. His voice was soft but urgent.

"Ah," said the nurse behind the desk, caught off-guard. She was trying to concoct an excuse. She gave up. "He's been at the country club. I think he's drunk."

"Great!" That was Bud, the driver. He sounded genuinely angry.

They do care about me, Laurie told herself. Finally somebody does. I'm going to be all right now. I know it.

"What you got?" asked Jill, coming around from behind the reception counter.

"Stab wound," said Bud. "Left anterior chest, possibly penetrating. Multiple contusions—"

The door opened. Laurie craned her neck.

It was the little boy, the pirate, and his mother. The towel had not stopped the bleeding. With each step, another drop hit the floor.

Jill intercepted them, affording the boy only a cursory appraisal. As if she had seen a lot worse already tonight. I'm sure she has, thought Laurie. But that little boy is so handsome, his—

"Fill out this form," said Jill to the mother. "Someone will be with you in a moment."

"Oh, but we should see a doctor right away!"

"He's with a patient. Would you please wait in Room A?"

The mother steered her boy to a seat. "Come on, honey." She removed the towel. "Thank you," Laurie heard her say ironically.

Then Laurie was moving again.

As she was wheeled into an examination room, she caught a glimpse of the boy, seated but still hunched over, now without the towel. His mouth was open. He could not close it because of the double-edged razor blade wedged against the roof of his mouth.

We also serve, she thought, who are too old for candy.

The sight shocked her fully awake. Her nerves were alive again now, her senses heightened. She heard a muffled bell ringing somewhere, voices from all directions, the clatter of a tray, the whirring of a floor polisher in another corridor. The lights were brighter as she was lifted onto an examination table; the pattern of the ceiling's acoustic tiles burned into her eyes. She could feel her shoulder now. It screamed to be left where it was.

Another voice: "It's Laurie Stro—"

"Yeah, Janet," said Bud gruffly. "Come on, come on, let's go!"

A new voice, weary but deep and authoritative: "Janet, get me some more coffee."

Footsteps going away. New footsteps coming in.

A doctor leaned over her. His eyes were red, as if they had seen too much. But he did not flinch. His breath smelled of bourbon.

"Well, let's see what we have here."

He even tried to smile down at her.

"Ah, yes. You've lost a lot of blood. We'll need to type it."

A young nurse joined him, holding a syringe. She had a plastic pumpkin on her uniform lapel. Laurie stared at it. The needle felt like a bee sting.

"When was the last time you had a tetanus shot?" asked the doctor.

"I don't know," was all Laurie could tell him. She was trying. But remembering was too much.

"Get me some, uh, three-o nylon and . . ."

"A cutting needle?"

"Yes."

"Right away." There was an older nurse. Her face was bland but determined, like a mother who knew her duty. Laurie felt better seeing her with the doctor. She left. Laurie hoped they would not both leave her.

"We're going to have to put her out."

"No! Don't put me to sleep!"

They began to cut away her bloodstained blue blouse.

She saw eyes trained on her. The ambulance driver and the other one, Jimmy.

"No. . . no!"

"Get them out of here," said the older nurse, returning.

"Take it easy." The doctor inserted another needle. Blood filled the syringe. The red line moved up and up, as if it would never stop.

"No," repeated Laurie. But her throat was dry and her voice merely a whisper. She had difficulty hearing it herself. "Don't . . . let them . . . put me out."

"Try to relax, Laurie," came the optimistic voice of the nurse with the pumpkin. Jill, said her name badge. "Dr. Mixter will have you stitched up in no time."

* * *

"REPEATING FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO JUST TUNED IN. THREE PEOPLE ARE DEAD TONIGHT AS THE RESULT OF AN ATTACK BY AN ESCAPED MENTAL PATIENT. I UNDERSTAND WE'RE GOING TO STAY ON THE AIR NOW. ANY FURTHER DETAILS WILL BE FORTHCOMING AS SOON AS WE GET THEM. THIS IS ROBERT MUNDY . . ."

Jimmy and the blonde nurse, Jill, sat listlessly in front of the television set.

Jimmy got up and left the staff lounge.

In the hallway, Dr. Mixter and the head nurse, Mrs. Alves, stood talking in low tones outside a room.

"And keep checking her," the doctor was saying. "She ought to be coming around any time now. Where's Janet?"

"She went to the cafeteria. She's on her break."

"Her break! There are no breaks tonight. Did she call Laurie's parents?"

"She tried. I can try again if—"

“Wait,” said the doctor, slapping his forehead. “They were at the party! Probably still there . . .”

The doctor and head nurse hurried off. Jimmy waited till they were out of the corridor. Then he smoothed his hair and stepped up to the door.

Inside it was dim. There was a shape on the bed. Jimmy opened the door carefully.

The door hardly made a sound, but as soon as it opened Laurie’s head rolled to the side. Her hair was spread across the pillowcase like fine silk. Incredibly, it shone, even in the moonlight coming through the blinds.

Her eyes swam up to meet his.

“Hi,” she said.

Her lips remained open. She was passive, waiting for him to say something.

Before he could speak, the door opened again behind him. A silhouetted shape stood there. A white shape.

Mrs. Alves stepped inside.

“Jimmy, leave her alone.” Mrs. Alves’ voice was restrained but commanding. To the figure on the bed she said, “How are you feeling?”

“I feel sore,” Laurie said. Her voice was barely a whisper, her energy completely drained. She moved her tongue laboriously over her dry lips. “What happened?”

“Cracked a bone,” said Mrs. Alves, adjusting the dressing on Laurie’s leg. The stethoscope around her neck swung like a snake with a silver head. “Lucky it wasn’t a break. The doctor thinks we should wait until tomorrow before we put a cast on.” She withdrew to the door. “See you tomorrow. Come on, Jimmy.”

Mrs. Alves closed the chart and went out to continue on her rounds.

Jimmy kept looking at Laurie.

“Can I get you something to drink,” he whispered, “or anything?”

“Mm-hm.”

“How about a Coke?”

Laurie nodded.

“Okay.”

“Thanks.” Her eyes stayed on his without blinking.

“Okay,” said Jimmy again, grinning foolishly.

Bud stuck his head in. “Come on! Jimmy, we gotta roll. ’Nother call just came in.”

Jimmy turned reluctantly, then turned back to the girl on the bed.

"I'll get you that Coke later."

Mrs. Alves touched their shoulders. "Out!"

On their way out of the building Jimmy saw the mother and son walking slowly back across the parking lot. He was still hunched over and holding the wadded towel under his chin, but now at least his mouth was closed.

"Does it hurt?" the mother was saying. "It hurts, doesn't it?"

"My moufe his hon fire," said the boy pitifully.

"What, honey?"

"Moufe his hon fire!"

"Your mouth is on fire. I know, honey, I know. Oh, damn those sick, sick people for doing that to you kids! I should have checked your candy first. I'll tell the other mothers . . . Gary, you've got to remember what house it was! I'm going to the police. They'll get him, don't you worry. And when they do, I hope they burn him good!"

"MOMENTS AGO, POLICE REPORTED THAT MICHAEL MYERS, FORMERLY OF HADDONFIELD, WHO FLED THE SMITH'S GROVE-WARREN COUNTY SANITARIUM LAST NIGHT, WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE BURNED TO DEATH. MEANWHILE, THREE BODIES WERE DISCOVERED IN THE UPSTAIRS BEDROOM OF THE HOUSE DIRECTLY BEHIND ME. IDENTIFICATION OF THE VICTIMS IS BEING WITHHELD PENDING NOTIFICATION OF THE . . ."

Farther along the sidewalk, out of camera range, a woman with a clipboard glanced along the block, at the lights and portable cameras in front of the Wallace house. Neighbors were clustered on the lawn, some in bathrobes, leaning closer together for warmth and information. Their faces were blank, uncomprehending, as if they had wandered by accident onto the set of a movie being acted out in a foreign language.

Several children in costume sat beneath a tree, eating candy.

The producer pointed at them with a pencil.

"Forget Mundy for the next segment. I want to concentrate on the house. Talk to some kids, see if anybody saw anything."

"Got it, Deb," said a young man in a jacket liner. He checked a stopwatch and made a note.

"You need their parents' permission to use a statement. If you can't find the parents, get a statement anyway."

She went to her cameraman and slipped inside the cables that connected him to the portable video unit. She screwed one eye shut and peered through the viewfinder.

The Wallace house. All the lights on inside now. A pumpkin on the porch, its color washed out in the glare. Uniformed police and ambulance attendants wheeling another sheeted form out the front door.

The sound of car doors slamming.

She panned to the right.

It was Sheriff Brackett, accompanied by a beefy deputy and a smallish, balding man in a trenchcoat.

“Move in,” said the producer. “Follow ’em, especially the bird dog in the coat. He might be a lawyer, doctor, something. I bet he’s the one who knows what’s really going on here.”

The camera zoomed in.

“Not now,” said the deputy as the producer closed the distance. He held out his arms to open a path for the Sheriff. Then, with great reluctance, he lifted a brown-stained sheet from the stretcher.

Brackett stood very still. A vein stood out on his neck. He shut his eyes. Took a breath. Opened his eyes.

It was true.

Annie Brackett’s head was centered perfectly on the pillow. Her dark, curly hair was attractively tousled. Only this time the hair at her forehead was stiff and caked, matted. Her pretty face was empty and without expression. Her throat had been cut in a brown line from ear to ear; a few thin vertical striations had dried on her neck and the collar of her blouse. She almost looked as if she had fallen peacefully asleep with her eyes open.

A flashbulb went off, catching her hair in a nimbus around her head.

Brackett said nothing.

He leaned over her, directly over the stretcher, until his eyes locked with hers. Then, very slowly, so slowly you could hear the joints crack in his fingers, he reached down and shuttered his hand over her face, closing the eyes forever.

He nodded to Hunt, the deputy. Hunt dropped the sheet.

Hunt looked at him grimly, a bit fearfully. Brackett cleared his throat.

“I, uh, have to, uh, go and tell my wife. Before somebody else does.”

Hunt let Jimmy and Bud carry the stretcher away.

“Go on home, Leigh,” said Hunt to the Sheriff. “Go on home. I’ll take care of everything.”

Brackett turned his eyes on Loomis then. They were black and smoldering. He straightened his massive shoulders.

“Damn you.”

“I’m sorry.” began Loomis.

“What have you done?”

Loomis attempted to explain. “I haven’t done anything.”

“You let him out!” The Sheriff’s growling voice rose to a howl.

Hunt touched his shoulder and the Sheriff snapped out of it.

He went back to the car before he could say or do anything else. His large hands were balled into fists at his sides.

“I didn’t let him out,” Loomis explained uselessly to Hunt, to himself. “I gave orders for him to be restrained.”

Two more sheeted bodies were rolled out of the house, down the walkway and past them. Hunt watched them being loaded away. Flashing police lights reddened his face.

“Now is there anything else that we can do for you?” he said to Loomis.

“If that wasn’t Michael Myers burning up in that car,” said Loomis, no longer concerned about sounding reasonable, “then a lot of other kids are going to be slaughtered tonight.” The words caught in his throat. Words that were thoughts, thoughts that were feelings. They made his voice break.

Hunt cut him off. “He’s dead. I saw him.”

“You saw a man with a mask,” Loomis explained.

“It was him.”

“I want to believe you.” That, thought Loomis, is the truth. “But I’ve got to be sure. I can’t stop until I’m certain he’s dead.”

Now that the Sheriff was gone, a cameraman moved in on them.

“You’re talking about him like he’s some kind of animal,” said Hunt.

“He was—”

“Will you keep ’em back?” Hunt noticed the camera and motioned for assistance.

Loomis stared past Hunt into the pumpkin on the porch, lost in its eyes.

“He was my patient for fifteen years,” he said in a low voice. “He became an obsession with me until I realized that there was nothing within him, neither conscience nor reason, that was even remotely human. An hour ago I stood up and—and fired six shots into him. He just got up and walked away.” He moved in front of Hunt and grabbed his attention. Perhaps if this man would listen . . . If Brackett wouldn’t, maybe his deputy would. “I’m talking about the real possibility that he is still out there!”

Hunt’s face and eyes were as blank as a manikin’s. He was waiting

for the doctor to finish. Not so that he could believe him, but so that he could figure out what to do about this out-of-town official who had been sent here to give orders which even the Sheriff obeyed, albeit reluctantly. Hunt had that nonexpression of a man who is paid not to think. He was probably just now reassessing the authority which had been given to a doctor who specializes in the criminally insane. *It takes one to know one,* his eyes said. *But I still sure wish I didn't have to listen to you.*

"Where did they take the body?" said Loomis.

"Coroner's office."

That's right, thought Loomis; nothing but the facts. But as a matter of fact that much might prove sufficient for now.

"Get a dentist to meet me there in half an hour," he instructed Hunt, and did not wait to argue.

Loomis glided away over the wet lawn, turning inward once more. The street, the police, the reporters grew vague and tenuous behind him in the mist.

None of this matters, he thought.

What is here and now has been here before and will surely be here again, unless I can do something to prevent its recurrence. The only permanence is the light eternally in conflict with the darkness.

And the darkness still survives.

Think! he told himself.

He had waited. When the time came, by whatever method he measured it, he found the means to return. He has armed himself. He has killed. And he will go on killing. Unless . . . When will it be enough for him? What is the final satisfaction he seeks?

Try to remember it all. You might be forgetting something. Some small but crucial detail from his past which might save all our souls now in the hour of our need. *Think!*

His face began to twitch involuntarily.

It was a dream. He couldn't shake it.

It was as if he had awakened to find himself trapped inside a nightmare from which there was no escape.

HAPPY
HALLOWEEN

CHAPTER

Five

The light came on.

The producer's eyes were bloodshot. It was past time to wrap.

". . . CROWDS ARE MILLING AROUND AND THE POLICE HAVE CORDONED OFF THE ENTIRE AREA. TO REPEAT: THREE YOUTHS HAVE BEEN FOUND MURDERED AT 3250 WOODBINE STREET IN THE NORTHWEST SECTION OF HADDONFIELD. DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET, ANOTHER TEENAGED GIRL WAS FOUND ALIVE. SHE WAS EVIDENTLY ATTACKED BY THE SAME SUSPECT . . ."

The producer wove through the crowd and ended up back at the camera truck.

The portable lights were emitting fine trails of steam that drifted upward and dissipated into the night sky, tracing a wispy path like the Milky Way through the stars. She pointed to her watch.

Mundy did not see her.

". . . POLICE PUT OUT AN ALL POINTS BULLETIN WITH A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSAILANT. BLOCKADES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED AT ALL OF THE MAIN ARTERIES IN TOWN AND DETECTIVE GARY HUNT OF THE HADDONFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT FEELS THAT THE SUSPECT WILL BE CAPTURED WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS . . ."

He was staring hypnotically into the lens. He appeared to be absorbed in a kind of onanistic communion with the crystal eye of the camera. It was eerie. Almost as if he saw, or believed he could see, the good people of Haddonfield growing drowsy in their darkened living rooms, hanging on his every word in an unholy electronic seance.

"NOT SINCE THAT NIGHT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO WHEN YOUNG MICHAEL MYERS TRAGICALLY MURDERED HIS SISTER CAN THE TOWN OF HADDONFIELD RECALL SUCH A NIGHT OF INFAMY . . ."

The producer exchanged glances with her assistant.

"The camera loves him, Deb," said the assistant.

"*He* thinks so," said the producer.

"He's making ratings history tonight, that's for sure. Listen to him. Smooth as hammered shit. Mundy magic."

"You think that's why?" She leaned in next to the camera and tried

in vain to catch the announcer's eye. But Mundy's syrupy voice droned on. "There's nothing else on the tube tonight except old movies. Most people are still up hoping their kids come home. What are they supposed to do, wait for the morning paper?"

"Word gets around fast when there's a murder in a burg like this. I hear the station switchboard's tied up with calls."

The producer waved. Mundy ignored her.

"Poor schmucks," she said. "They should lock their doors and leave it to the professionals. Nothing else is going to happen tonight. He's done his dirty work, whoever he is. Probably laid up on skid row by now, sleeping it off."

"Yeah. But you can't blame them. What about the kids?"

"I wouldn't let my kids out on a night like this," she said. "If I had any kids. Which is about as likely as rocking horse shit. Too many weirdos out there. Christ, this whole town's a mausoleum. They have to tie tin cans to their puppy dogs' tails for excitement, you know? I'm not kidding."

"You want to wrap it and go to bed?"

"Define your terms," said the producer.

The assistant smiled hopefully.

"Wrap it up here as soon as you can," she said. "As soon as ol' blue eyes falls out of love with himself for a beat."

"And then?"

"Then you and the crew get your tails over to the hospital. This story's the biggest thing to hit Haddonfield since Stoddard's Store stopped carrying HUSTLER."

"Bucking for an Emmy, boss?"

"I'm bucking for a way out of this chicken outfit, Barry. By whatever means it takes. If sleazy sex murders will do it for me, then bring on the blood-and-guts. Just as long as it's not *my* blood and *my* guts." She reached out and put her hand over the red light on top of the camera in a last bid to get the newsman's attention.

The assistant cocked an eye at her. "You haven't lived here very long," he said soberly. "You didn't grow up here. You don't know these people like I do. If it was your friends got offed tonight—"

"Spare me," she said, preoccupied. "Barry, don't you know better than to believe everything news people say . . . even me? Lighten up. I'm only protecting my image. I've really got the heart of a sweet, innocent girl."

The assistant smirked. "Where, boss? In a jar on your mantle?"

"Actually it's in the kitchen. I use it as a doorstop." She found a

blank cue card and a grease pencil, wrote “ID” on it and held it below the camera.

“IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE KILLINGS, THE STREETS BETWEEN CHESTNUT AND TENTH ARE JAMMED WITH PEOPLE AND CARS . . . REPEATING THAT, UH, THESE STREETS ARE CHESTNUT AND TENTH . . . THEY’RE JUST JAMMED WITH BOTH PEOPLE AND CARS . . .”

The producer held up her index finger. She waved it until Mundy could not help but notice. Then she took her finger and slashed it across her throat from ear to ear with finality. She made a gagging expression, her tongue hanging out.

“WE NOW RETURN YOU TO OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING,” said Mundy. “UNTIL THEN, PLEASE STAY TUNED FOR FURTHER . . .”

“CUT, already!” yelled the producer.

She floored the gas pedal of her Valiant and left the circus behind her.

In her rearview mirror she saw the last of the police lights bouncing off the Wallace and Doyle houses.

“A hot time in Hicksville,” she muttered.

She flicked on the radio.

Music blipped past, songs about love or the lack of it, too much or too little, too late or too soon. The old story.

She glanced up. Ahead, a squad car was parked across the intersection of Tenth and Orange Grove.

She left her foot on the accelerator and slid her hands to the top of the wheel as if preparing to run it.

An officer climbed out of the car and flagged her down.

She sighed and eased up with her right foot.

She rolled down her window and pointed to the card in the window, on top of her dash.

“Press,” she said.

The officer trained his flashlight in her face. “You alone?”

“What does it look like?” she said.

He sauntered around the car, hitting the dirty windows with his beam.

“You’re with the press, you say?”

“WWAR. Don’t tell me you’re going to ask for my registration. At a time like this.”

“Nice night,” he said.

"Yes," she said, "it sure is. It might rain tomorrow. Christmas is coming in a month and a half. Listen, can I pass? I've got to get to Haddonfield Memorial. I'm sure you know there's been a—"

"Not a very safe night, though to be out. Alone and all. Pretty young thing like you."

"I'm sorry. It's been a long day. Night." She shielded her eyes from the flashlight and tried another tack. "You're name's Rettig, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I thought so. I remember you from that snake hunt out in Russelville last summer. Or was it the two-headed calf story over in Hardin?" She sat up in her seat, unbottoning another notch on her blouse. "Have you been on this case from the beginning?"

"Since the break-in at Stoddard's this morning, yes, ma'am. You know, Sheriff Brackett left orders with the Highway Patrol to keep reporters away from the hospital till tomorrow. He wants to talk to that Strode girl first. If I were you—"

"You're not. I mean, I'm glad you're not! Lucky for you. Well, I've got to get back to the station. Late updates and all that. You know how it is."

The deputy made a note of her license plate. "Well, you go ahead then," he said. Reluctantly. "Just be sure you stay on the main road. And don't go picking up any hitchhikers. You see any suspicious characters, you report it to—"

"I'll report straight to you. Or Sheriff Brackett. Whatever." She eased in the clutch and dropped into gear.

The deputy tipped his hat. "You have a nice night now, hear?"

She started rolling.

"Wait a minute," called the deputy.

She groaned.

"Is anything wrong, officer?"

"Better get that left front tire checked. She's runnin' pretty low."

"I'll do that." She waited. "Thank you very much."

"Be glad to give you a hand, if you'll pull over to the side. 'Bout ready to be relieved here, anyway. How's your spare?"

"My spare's fine. I mean, I'll do it myself. I'll stop off on the way. I need gas, anyway."

"No stations open around here this time of night."

"I know where there's one. Hey. I'll bet you'd make a great interview for the Special Report tomorrow morning. Someone like you who knows everything about what's going on . . . Have you ever seen yourself on television?"

"I'd have to check with the Captain . . ."

"You do that. And then check with us. With me. Or I'll call you. Don't call us, okay? We'll call you."

Before he could change his mind she drew away smoothly, waving out the window.

"Hicks nix pix in sticks," she said to herself.

She drove on.

His red light faded in the distance, finally obscured by trees. Or by shadows across her back window. Shadows of whatever was in the back seat. Boxes or—

Her eyes froze on the mirror.

As a band of light from a mercury streetlamp wavered across the rear upholstery, she reached up and panned the mirror from right to left, coming to a stop at her own stark face.

There was a shape in the back seat.

"Five," she said, "four, three, two one . . ." She spun around.

It was her jacket. It was wadded up against the armrest. As she slowed, it slithered down to the floorboard.

"Hick cop," she said. "Could have at least checked the back seat."

She set her shoulders and bore down on the white line.

The periphery of Haddonfield slipped past like a speeded-up filmstrip. A railroad crossing with an X marking the spot. An out-of-business Dairy Queen. A twenty-four-hour laundromat with pale, aqueous lights behind the machines. As she passed, the reflected image of her taillights smeared a red afterimage across the sign in the window. HAPPY HALLOWEEN, said the sign.

She groped for the cassette tape recorder on the seat next to her. Her fingers found the microphone and mashed the RECORD button.

"Special Feature on Haddonfield Slasher," she said. "Open on a montage of the town. City streets in slo-mo. Businesses, all closed. Hand-held shots, moving—use Jeff's car, Portapak Two. Number One's losing its charge again . . .

"Let's see. Voice over. Use Mundy. No, my own voice. No, get a local with the right accent. Talking about what it's like growing up in this armpit. Strike that. In this typical American town. Then segue into music, pop tunes since the fifties, ending on current top forty . . ."

Again she toyed with the dashboard radio. Still more of the same. A disco, some new wave, country and western. A lot of country and western.

"No, no," she said, "that's the wrong sound. It's got to be nostalgic. Let's see. How about this one?" She opened her throat and sang.

"Mis-ter Sandman
Send me a dream
Make him the cutest thing
That I've ever seeeen . . ."

She stopped singing.

She heard a dull clicking sound.

"Great," she said, "no more tape."

She knuckled the OFF button.

The clicking persisted. Louder, more insistent.

It began to rock the car.

"This," she said, "I simply do not believe." She steered to the side.

She got out. The moon was sinking into the top of an oak tree, the edges of its face eaten away like Swiss cheese by the chattering leaves. There was no one around, nothing.

A deslolate intersection on the outskirts of town with a boarded-up beer bar on one corner, a barbershop with its crimson-striped pole on the other, a Weenie Wigwam fast-food stand, a mobile home trailer park with a sign that said DRY LAWN ACRES.

She walked through the misty beams of her headlights. They were yellow and none too steady; the battery was on its last legs. The dusty gravel in front of the car cast long, jagged shadows, like hundreds of extracted teeth.

"Bitchin' short, Deb," she said to herself. She walked all the way around.

The left front tire was flat as a pancake. The sidewall was cracked out from the rim, and a dirty smell of burning rubber wafted into her nostrils, along with the rich, ripe aroma that left no doubt a dairy farm was nearby.

"The Man," she said, "was right. Give him a gold star for that one." She sighed a sigh that was like all the breaths she had ever drawn going out at once. "Way to go, Deb. Always in a hurry. But like they say, you'll probably be late for your own funeral . . ."

She leaned in and shut off the ignition, retrieved the keys.

The car creaked, settling. She heard another sound then, a faint cry from the bushes behind the car. She killed her lights and tried to make out its source as she shuffled back to the trunk. The cry was louder.

She started to key the trunk, eager to be out of this place.

The cry became a scream.

She took a look over her shoulder. A red eye appeared over the crest over the hill she had just driven. It was racing toward her down the middle of the road. She saw lettering growing larger:

The red light spun past her and raced like a wolverine through the intersection without stopping. It cornered on two wheels, then disappeared, carrying its screaming siren with it.

“Thanks,” she said, “I needed that. Don’t worry about me. No time to lose, boys, when you’ve got a couple of dead ones for the morgue . . .”

As soon as she touched it, the trunk lid opened like a jaw.

Inside were two old tennis rackets, an empty can of tennis balls, a deflated football, a Frisbee, a ruptured styrofoam ice chest and an old blanket covering God-knows-what.

“God knows what,” she said.

She found the jack. The handle was impregnated with coarse black grease. It scraped off under her nails like congealed fat, one of her nails broke.

“Right,” she said.

She kicked the jack under the ass end of the car and started pumping.

Suddenly she saw her own shadow drawn in bas-relief against the pavement as new lights approached. The gutter was full of refuse: an old TV Guide, a plastic six-pack ring, an empty pack of Big Red chewing gum, a rotting, translucent balloon, a matchbook from the Rabbit-In-Red Lounge. She pumped and pumped. The car was about two inches higher.

A red Ford pickup truck whooshed past, blaring a Marshall Tucker tune, “Rumors Are Raging (About You and Me).”

The producer raised a dirty hand and gave it the finger in passing.

Brakes grabbed. Tire treads bit the road.

The truck backed up, bringing Marshall Tucker with it.

“Hi, are you?”

A heavy-duty hee-haw from the cab. “That’s right,” muttered the producer to herself, “sit there and watch. It’s a spectator sport, didn’t you know that?”

The truck’s door opened, closed. It sounded like the side of a tank slamming shut.

“Out of the frying pan,” she said to herself, “and into the fucking fire.”

She raised her head.

“Hi, yourself,” she said.

He posed there, backlighted by his own headlights. A burly guy,

early thirties, moustache, the kind that droops down over the upper lip like a sieve until it bleaches out from too much beer. A red plaid wool jacket. A Toronto Maple Leafs cap. He looked like he handled heavy machinery for a living.

"Oh great, great," she said.

The driver took a long pull from the bottle of Moose Head and smacked his lips.

"Not bad so far." He chuckled. *Chortled* is more the word. "Nothing like a squeeze who's good with her hands. That's what I always say."

He handed her his Moose Head.

"Thanks, she said, "I guess.

He gave her a slow smile and licked his lips. Then he planted his boots on either side of the jack and wrapped his chunky fingers around the bar. With a series of sure flexions he drove the bumper until darkness showed under the collapsed tire.

"Guess you'll owe me one." He winked.

"Guess I will," she said. "I think the spare's in back."

He bent over and spun off the lug nuts with the jack handle. The way they twirled into his fingers, it was like he was catching watermelon seeds. He stood and hiked up his jeans and held out his empty hand.

She gave him back the beer bottle.

"You do that real well," she said.

"Don't I, though? You should see me when I really get into it."

He drank another third of the beer and set it inside the open trunk. Rolled out the spare. Bounced it to the front. She followed.

"I'll watch you so I'll know how it's done."

"You sure you never done this before?" he said.

He was down low, looking up her skirt.

She stepped back.

He lined up the holes and reached for a nut. His hand brushed her ankle; his callused skin caught against her nylons. She ignored it. When the hand spidered up toward the back of her knee, she high-stepped so that her hip bumped the car and very nearly knocked it off the jack.

"So," he said, "trick or treat?"

"That's it," she said, her voice rising forcefully. "Okay, all right. Listen." Her slender hands pushed the air. "I didn't ask you to stop."

"Who's complainin'?"

"I could have done it myself. So why don't you just get back in your truck and—and roll on out of here. Now."

He looked her up and down, his eyes rolling over her body like ball bearings. He came to a conclusion. He stood. He dropped the jack handle. It twanged on the ground.

He held out his dirty hands, palms up, and shrugged.

“Happy Halloween,” he said.

She moved away from him. Her dress whispered against the metal of the car.

“Don’t get your pretty little dress dirty,” was the last thing he said.

She watched the pickup as it spit gravel and crossed the intersection. She watched until it was completely out of sight.

Her nostrils were flaring and tears of rage were welling in her eyes.

“Fuck,” she said, “you.”

She snatched up the jack handle.

When she was finished she tightened the lug nuts and lowered the bumper. She rattled the jack free and carried it back to the trunk.

“Ha,” she said, “forgot your beer, didn’t you, asshole?”

She looked inside the trunk.

The beer bottle he had left there was gone. She puzzled over this for a second or two. “How did he do that?” she said to herself. “I didn’t see him go back . . . Sleight-of-hand artist. Boy, wasn’t he? Oh, well.”

Her hands were now black as coal.

She reached for the corner of the blanket to wipe them.

She yanked it. The blanket fell away.

A shape the size of a mountain on two legs unfolded inside the trunk. It rose up and up. Then it sprang. It took her head back by the hair. Her white throat was suddenly exposed. A flash of silver and her throat had been slashed, with such brutal force that her head was nearly severed from her shoulders. It happened like that and then it was over, more quickly than the eye or any camera could have recorded. Even in slo-mo.

There was a jingling of keys. A moment later the car was running again.

CHAPTER

Six

In the staff lounge at Haddonfield Memorial, the movie was still running.

Onscreen, a tall man in a black coat led a group of slow-moving ghouls toward an old house. The house was fortified with boarded-up windows and a barricaded door, but the ghouls were not deterred. The tall man's arms extended stiffly. He approached the porch with hungry determination.

"You ought to watch this flick," said the ambulance driver, Bud. "You might learn something."

"Like what?" said Janet. She was staring past the set, preoccupied.

"Like how to deal with, you know, junk that goes bump in the night. Dead people, for instance."

"Some of us don't have to turn on the television for that sort of thing," said Janet. "Some of us get enough of that right here."

"Yeah, you know about sick people, messed up people. But the ones Jimmy and I had to deal with tonight, hey, they were *really* messed up. They were dead."

"Why don't you knock it off?" said Jimmy irritably.

"Yes, please," said Janet. "You don't have to dwell on it."

Bud took a long toke from his joint.

"It's not like just a wind that's passing through," he said, sucking his breath in. "It's all around you. I found that out in 'Nam. Look at that dude."

On the TV screen a lanky black man, the hero of the film, lit a torch and thrust it at the walking dead on the porch. They fell back temporarily.

"He knows the score," Bud continued. "Fight fire with fire. The cops know that, too. When they get the guy that did it, they're gonna burn his ass good. It's the only thing creeps like that understand."

"They already got him," Jimmy said.

"Yeah? Then why are all those cop cars still tearassing around town? Listen, you can hear the sirens. He's still out there. Take ol' Bud's word for it. Watch this part—it's good."

A shot of hands groping through cracks in walls. More boards

hastily nailed up. Gunfire. And screams. Lots of screams.

"Turn it off," said Janet.

"No way. Wait till you see the good part. Pretty soon they start eatin' people. Fingers, guts. . ."

"You're disgusting!"

Bud shrugged and clamped the end of his joint in a hemostat and fired it up again with his Bic. "Don't get on my case," he said. "I'm only tellin' it for real." He offered the joint to Jimmy. "Ain't that right, college boy?"

"No," said Jimmy.

The movie cut away to another bulletin.

". . . IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE KILLINGS, THE STREETS BETWEEN CHESTNUT AND TENTH ARE JAMMED WITH PEOPLE AND CARS . . ."

"Speaking of eating," said Bud. "I sure could go for a pizza now. Nice big one with sausage, onions, peppers. But no mushrooms. I hate mushrooms."

Jimmy ignored him and got up. He began pacing.

The live newscast cut to a remote shot of a street corner. It was roadblocked against a stream of automobile headlights. More police cars were arriving to bolster the traffic barricades.

"THIS IS USUALLY A QUIET, PEACEFUL STREET, BUT TONIGHT THE NEIGHBORS WERE STUNNED BY THE GRUESOME SIGHT OF THREE BODIES BEING WHEELED OUT OF THIS HOUSE. THE NAMES OF THE YOUNG VICTIMS HAVE NOT YET BEEN RELEASED, BUT PEOPLE IN THE CROWD HAVE RECOGNIZED THEM AS NEIGHBORHOOD TEENAGERS. I'M TOLD THAT THEY WERE ALL FRIENDLY KIDS WHO LIVED NEARBY, ONE OF WHOM MAY HAVE BEEN BABYSITTING HERE TONIGHT . . ."

"Looks like a goddamn homecoming," said Bud.

Janet could not finish her Coke.

"I gotta go," she said. But she made no move. She was tired and nervous from waiting to see what would happen next. By the look on her face, the announcement only confused her more.

"So go," said Bud.

Jimmy looked up and down the hall. He came back in.

Over their heads the diffused lighting flickered and buzzed as if an insect were trapped inside one of the neon tubes.

"Julie saw him, you know," said Janet very seriously.

"Who?" said Bud.

"Michael Myers."

“Come on. . .”

“I swear. Yesterday when she was coming to work.” Her eyes were large and fixed, seeing it.

“Where did she see him?”

“You know the Shop and Bag out by the mall? She stopped at the light and saw him walking in that field behind the Lost River Drive-In. Julie said he was so creepy . . .”

“Julie’s fulla shit. He didn’t escape until last night.”

“You don’t have to swear about it.”

“She’s a goddamn moron, anyway.”

Janet’s face boiled with barely-suppressed revulsion. “Every other word you say is either hell or shit or damn.”

“Sorry. I guess I just fuck up all the time.”

Janet gave up. She stood and left the lounge.

“Bye,” said Bud after she had gone.

“Why don’t you just rest your mouth for a while?” said Jimmy. “Everybody’s pretty uptight tonight. You’re not helping things.”

“There’s only one thing’ll help me tonight. Two things. Karen, where are you and those humongous tits of yours?!”

In the town square, near the shopping center, a few pedestrians were still in motion.

Some were in costume. Whether the pirates and assorted ghouls and demons had not yet gone home from trick-or-treating, or whether they had been called back once only to sneak out for a second round of make-believe mayhem was impossible to determine. But it was obvious that spirits were high; movements were jerky and angular, the silhouettes of their costumes blowing in the wind like tattered pennants of unknown design, so that the shadowed sidewalks and dark awnings and gaping caverns of doorways appeared to be alive with restless, furtive activity. Here echoing footsteps so quick and faint they might have belonged to running mice tapped in secret procession between a hardware store and gift shop; there fading laughter not unlike demonic giggling sounded across the impenetrable distance between sidewalk and parking lot; and there, the afterimage of a scurrying witch’s glance lingered under a totem lamppost, lighted from within and winking into invisibility when finally faced, like the contrail of a shooting star that falls across the evening sky only to disappear when confronted directly.

And here a nurse, whose name was Karen Bailey, already late for her shift at Memorial Hospital, hurrying toward her car, racing the

hands of her wrist watch.

She was tall and slender, physically presupposing, with a steady, efficient gait and a determined cant to her shoulders. Beside her and two steps behind was another young woman.

". . . I can*not* believe it. Pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey and bobbing for apples. Actually bobbing in water, no less!"

"Oh, they have to use water so you can get the apples out of—"

"I'm never going to another Halloween party as long as I live, especially at Steven Mackle's house. And of course now I'm going to be late." Karen fished in her purse for the keys to her red Mustang.

"You gotta drive me home first."

"Oh Darcy, I don't have time."

"Well, you got to!"

Karen reached inside her open convertible and dropped her purse on top of her uniform. "Can't you ask Eddie Lee?"

"He's in *Russel*ville!"

"It's five minutes to your house, another five minutes back to the hospital. Mrs. Alves is gonna kill me," said Karen despondently.

"You promised me," said Darcy.

"I know I did," sighed Karen.

They got into the car without another word.

The red Mustang pulled out.

Neither driver nor passenger noticed the Valiant parked under a broken streetlight.

Neither did the children who hunkered at the corner, busy dividing candy, nor the teenaged boy who passed them on the sidewalk. He had on a straw hat that masked his face, raccoon-like, from the faint spill of overhead light, and as he walked he hoisted a battery-operated stereo radio with separate woofers and tweeters so that it was balanced on one shoulder, inches from his ear.

"Oh, Mister Sandman," the radio was playing, an old song from the Golden Oldies station, *"send me a dream . . . make him the cutest that I've ever seen . . ."*

The side of his face blocked from view by the monstrous radio, the teenager looked straight ahead as he ambled past the children. Advertising neon blurred nearby; he did not turn his head.

A tall, dark shape in a black coat was walking toward him on the sidewalk.

The shape's arms were stiff at its sides and its feet moved slowly and deliberately, as though weighted. As it passed through an unexpected circle of light from an electric pumpkin window display,

its pale rubber mask seemed to undulate with a ghostly sheen, its eye slits black as coal, the tuft of artificial hair sewn to the crown of the mask sprung out in comic abandon, creating a spiked, aboriginal profile to the oversized head.

But it was hardly an unusual mask in the town that night. Several exactly like it had been in the window of Stoddard's Store only that morning, before the break-in. The robbery had not received much attention on the news; only one of the masks, some rope and a set of kitchen cutlery were stolen. Not much in dollars and cents, and hardly worth the time Sheriff Brackett had spent in answering the call. Chances were this teenager had passed the same mask in the window many times in the past few weeks. He had not paid any attention to the mask then. He did not now.

The boy passed the shape without a second look.

The music went with him.

The shape kept walking.

At the end of the sidewalk a sign:

HOSPITAL

From this distance the amber sodium lights of the emergency lot were clearly visible. It was an easy walk the rest of the way. In fact, many of the locals left their cars in the shopping center lot as a matter of course on days when hospital visiting was heavy.

Without breaking its lumbering stride, the shape kept walking.

Fifteen minutes later, a red Mustang fishtailed into the staff parking lot.

Karen flew out of the car. A thin film of perspiration glossed her face as she reached for her purse and uniform and trotted toward the building. She did not even glance at her wristwatch. Her pink scarf, rendered a sickly green by the sodium lights, streamed behind her like a sea plant as she picked up the pace.

She did not take notice of the ominous, elongated shadows under the posts or of the landscaped flowerbeds, the arrangements of rocks and the unhealthy state of the plants there by the back of the building. Nor did she notice the lumbering movement which cast a peculiar ripple along the chrome of the cars at the edge of the lot, coming to a halt at the left rear fender of her own Mustang. The reflection was distorted, but held the anamorphic image of a tall shape in a black coat, arms stiff as it stood next to the red car, staring after her, head tilted curiously to one side, its mask highlighted and framed perfectly in the circle of the car's outside rearview mirror like a death's-head cameo.

The shape waited until the staff door closed.

Then it moved on.

Toward the building.

Garrett, the security guard, was watching television.

Not the bank of closed-circuit sets which monitored the parking lot and key corridors of the hospital, but the local channel, WWAR, where now another reel of Dr. Dementia's Horror Movie Marathon was airing in grainy black-and-white. Just now a montage of clutching hands filled the screen, accompanied by endless blood-curdling screams and a cheap but poundingly effective music score.

Garrett settled his enormous gut behind the desk and thumbed through a copy of MERCENARY ADVENTURERS magazine. The Pinup-of-the-Month was a full-page closeup of the severed head of an Oriental human being, mounted on a stick. The sharpened end of the bamboo was pointing out of a vacant eye socket. The caption read: "You Don't Need an M-16 to Bring Home a Trophy From Today's Preemptory Incursions!"

He wagged his head and chuckled at the picture.

On the first of the monitors, something moved at the entrance to the parking lot, then dematerialized off the edge of the screen.

He did not notice this.

Above the screams and the music, there came a pounding.

Garrett looked up.

Hands were pounding the boarded windows of an old farmhouse. Wood splintered under the assault and fingers broke through, clawing and grasping.

Garrett returned to the pin-up, then flipped ahead to the letters page, which was entitled "He-Man-To-Man."

The pounding was more insistent.

Garrett swiveled in his chair.

A silhouette was pounding on the guard station door.

He marked his place in the magazine, cut off the horror movie and reluctantly got up.

He opened the door on darkness. Before it was all the way open, the silhouette pushed inside.

"Thanks, Mr. Garrett!"

"Hi, Karen," said the guard. "Did you hear?"

"Hear what?"

"Aw, some weirdo's out there, cutting kids up. He's—"

“Yeah. On the radio.” She hurried to punch in.

Garrett hooked his thumbs in his web belt and puffed his chest out. “It was drugs.”

“Was it? I gotta go. I’m late.” She folded her uniform over her arm and crossd to the inner door. The plastic bag covering the uniform rippled with dull reflections in the electronic light.

Garrett stayed where he was, rocking authoritatively on his heels.

Behind him, the monitors continued to scan the inner and outer perimeters of the grounds. On one of the exterior screens, a figure could be seen passing an unmarked doorway. The figure became a grainy shadow at the edge of camera range, and then melted off the screen.

“Yup,” said Garrett. “Teenagers on drugs . . .”

“. . . Seen this flick so many times,” Bud was saying. His chin was down and his eyes were having trouble focusing.

Jimmy paced the lounge, touching the Coke machine, the counter top, the cups and trays, straightening chairs for something to do.

“Too bad we missed the first picture they had on tonight. Shit, what’s the name of it? *The Thing*, yeah. That guy from Gunsmoke was in it, played the monster. This big ol’ hairy *thing* comes down in a fuckin’ flyin’ saucer, he’s all frozen—been in suspended animation since way back when. Then, when they thaw his ass . . .”

“I saw it,” said Jimmy. “When I was a kid.”

“Right. And then he starts rippin’ through doors, kickin’ ass on some dogs . . . He hangs this one poor son of a bitch upside down and bleeds him! Yeah and there’s this phony doctor, he thinks he’s the only one understands the Thing, but when he finally gets there, well, the ol’ Thing just blows him away like everybody else. Finally the soldiers fry him, though, and—hi, Karen!”

Karen stuck her head in the doorway. “Hi.”

“You’re late,” said Bud.

“Yeah.” Karen smiled at Bud and toyed with the ends of her pink scarf. “I gotta get on the ward,” she said apologetically. The hallway behind her was empty, so she stretched it as long as she could. “Hi, Jimmy,” she added.

“Oh, hi, Karen.” Jimmy gave her a half-hearted nod.

She adjusted the purse and uniform over her arm and stood expectantly over Bud. The driver’s eyes traveled familiarly over her sweater and the taut lines of her designer jeans. He gave her a lazy, sloe-eyed grin and crept his fingertips across the table toward her

wrist.

She stroked one of his fingers. She shifted her weight from foot to foot, still out of breath. The ribbed pattern of her sweater swelled; in the strained silence her breasts rose and fell; there was the almost imperceptible whisper of her skin moving against the inside of her clothing. She noticed the clock on the wall and withdrew her hand.

“See you later,” she said.

“Right.”

Bud watched the designer jeans disappear down the hall. Then he kicked back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head.

“*A-mazing grace,*” he sang, “*come sit on my face . . .*”

“Look,” said Jimmy, “why don’t you just shut up, all right?”

“All right,” said Bud obligingly. “What are you all revved-up about?”

“It coulda been Ziggy, you know.” Jimmy’s words were clipped and fast, half-stuttering. “It could have been your brother Mark they pulled out of there.”

“All right, so what do you want me to do? Look, Jimmy, Rule Number One: never get involved with a patient. Nurses, that’s another story. But patients, it’s no good. It never works out.”

Jimmy lost his patience and went to the door.

“Where you goin’, college boy?”

Jimmy ignored him.

“I’m tellin’ you. Listen to ol’ Bud!”

The door started to close. On the wall outside was a crêpe paper decoration. HAPPY HALLOWEEN, it said.

“Shit,” Bud said after him, “you wouldn’t have made fifteen minutes in ’Nam, college boy.”

“You awake?”

Laurie’s head rolled on the pillow and her eyes darted to the door, which was ajar a few inches. She had not heard it open. She had been thinking about—something. She did not want to think about it. She did not want to think about anything. But the colors had started to form before her eyes in the grainy darkness over her bed, swirling over her in a misty whiteness. And there had been voices, too, heard from far away over a long-distance telephone wire or from another room, a room she was not supposed to enter. And other sounds. A dripping. The color red, the darkest red she had ever seen. And a face turning toward her. She could almost see it.

But it was not this face. This was a good face, kind and unbelievably

tender. Like a brother. Her heart speeded unaccountably and she raised herself a few inches, suppressing the thought.

"Yeah."

Jimmy's face hovered over her. His skin was so soft and blue from the moonlight coming through the window that she wanted to reach up and touch it. But she could hardly move. There was a pain in her shoulder and a constriction in her arm, inside the elbow. An I.V. bottle swung on its stand as she endeavored to sit up, disturbing a tube that ran from the needle in her arm.

She cleared her head. "I've just been thinking."

"You shouldn't try to think."

There, that was proof. He understood, he really did.

"I know. But I can't help it. I still can't believe it."

Jimmy closed the door. The bluish light through the blinds made a striped pattern over his face, and then the pattern moved. That was because of the leaves outside the window, she realized.

"They should have—they should have handled him more carefully."

"Who?"

Jimmy's voice was intense, wound up like a spring. "Michael Myers."

Laurie could not imagine what he was talking about. Still something about the name chilled her blood; she did not know why. "Michael Myers?"

"Yeah, he's—he's the guy that was after you."

"You mean the Myers house? That little kid who killed his sister?"

"Yeah."

Jimmy was uneasy talking about it, but it was obvious that he needed to talk to someone. And he was giving her information so that she could understand. Begin to understand. She wanted to thank him for that and for the delicate way in which he raised the subject. She was not sure she was ready for the rest of the story yet; contradictory emotions tugged at her, the need to know and the desire to erase it all from her mind forever. She was not sure which would be easier.

Her mind raced. She could not stop it. What he was telling her did not add up. What did it have to do with anything?

"But he's in a hospital somewhere."

"He escaped last night."

It was too facile. "How do you know?" she asked, dubious.

His face was so open and uncalculating. "It's all over the radio. Television too. It's on right now."

Laurie felt a wind rush through her chest. It was colder than the

night air outside. She forced herself to breathe again.

“Why me?” she whispered. “I mean, *why me?”*

For some reason she could not keep her breath working right. She lowered back onto the pillow, the blue-white bed. The ceiling swam before her eyes. Expanding, contracting. “Oh God . . . !” she said.

The door opened again.

Laurie squeezed her eyes shut, unable to move.

“Time’s up, Jimmy,” said Mrs. Alves. “Let’s go.”

She opened her eyes. Jimmy was leaving. “Okay, okay,” he said, his voice lighter again. When he looked back at her his tone remained deceptively casual, but a tension he could not hide gripped his vocal cords so that his words seemed to carry great weight. “I’ll be back. In a little while.”

“No, you won’t,” said Mrs. Alves. “Visiting hours are definitely over.”

Jimmy signaled from behind the nurse.

“I’m warning you,” said Mrs. Alves.

With a mocking gesture, Jimmy left.

Mrs. Alves examined the dressing on Laurie’s arm. For the first time Laurie noticed that it was heavily bandaged. “Men,” said Mrs. Alves. “You can’t live with them, you can’t live without them. How’s that shoulder feel?”

“A little better.”

“Good.” Mrs. Alves softened and smiled maternally. Laurie decided she liked the woman. “We’ve been trying to get hold of your parents. Dr. Mixter told me they were at the same party he was, but they’re not there now and they’re not at home. Do you have any idea where else they might be?”

Laurie twisted the ends of her hair with her good hand. She wanted to pull it over her eyes to keep the pictures from coming again. She wanted to crawl down and draw the sheet over her head. But she couldn’t. Instead she played with her hair. “No,” she said, as Mrs. Alves’ voice seemed to recede.

“I’ll just keep trying.”

Laurie repositioned her head on the pillow, following the voice before Mrs. Alves would slip away and leave her here alone.

Behind the woman’s head Halloween decorations were visible in the hall: orange and black lettering, even a real jack-o’-lantern with a candle inside sending black smoke trails into the air over the desk.

You know what the lettering said.

Mrs. Alves picked up the phone next to the bed. She dialed. She

rattled the cradle in frustration. “Oh, this is just . . .” Laurie heard her say under her breath.

Somewhere down the hall an elevator door shuttled open and closed.

Mrs. Alves said, “Janet!”

The dark-haired nurse popped in.

“Yes, Mrs. Alves?”

“Go tell Mr. Garrett we’re having trouble with the phones. Right now.”

“He’s at the other end of the hall . . . !”

“Janet,” said Mrs. Alves sternly.

“Yes, Mrs. Alves.” Janet hurried away.

The feeling Laurie had had all along was beginning to surface now. She could not hold it down. It was the worst feeling she had ever known in her life, and it was getting worse. She did not know what to do about it except to wait, and keep on waiting, until she could wake up all the way.

“What’s wrong with the phones?” she asked weakly.

“It’s nothing for you to worry about.” Mrs. Alves smiled, but Laurie could see something else in her face, impatience and . . . *something else*. What was it? Simultaneously Laurie did not want to know. “Just get some rest right now. I’ll let you know as soon as we get ahold of your parents.”

Mrs. Alves smiled her easy smile again and left.

The door closed and Laurie was alone.

She sat up in bed. The effort made her dizzy. The room: chair, closet, bathroom, nightstand, window. Moonlight outside.

Something moving.

Laurie gripped the sheet until her knuckles went white.

The movement repeated. It was branches. That was all it was. The branches of an oak tree rustling and scrubbing their details against the pane. They seemed to be scraping the window; she was absolutely sure she was hearing a sound that was not in the closed room a minute ago. It was—

It was not a scraping of leaves. It was a throbbing. Swelling, quiet. Swelling, quiet. Getting louder. Closer.

She put her hands to her ears and pain shot up her injured arm. But still she heard it.

Louder, louder.

It was the sound of her own heart pulsing in her ears like a drum beaten underwater.

Laurie shook it off and took up the phone.

Mrs. Alves was right, of course. It was dead.

Dead, she thought. Dead. Dead . . .

The sound repeated. Ticking. Like a dripping. Like—

An airplane made a low pass over the hospital, breaking the white noise. Laurie concentrated and held to it till it was gone, passed over like giant wings beating the air, rattling the venetian blinds, tick, tick, ticking . . .

Then there was only the sound of her breathing, alone in darkness.

But it was not completely dark. She could see shapes begin to shift and move, the chair tilting, the parallel lines of the blinds bowing, the drawcord undulating, like the white sheet over her legs, rising and falling, beginning to glow with a light of its own.

She shut her eyes tightly.

The white light went out, then came on again.

It was within her. It had about it the whiteness of eyes, the cold glare of pearlescent flesh.

Now she did not know which was worse, the light or the lack of it.

CHAPTER

Seven

The darkness had found a way into the building.

It glided down the untended corridors of empty floors; it sank into doors left open, filling the spaces there and pressing doors closed on shadow; it followed the contours of light that connected halls and offices, leaving them dimmer in its wake. It gravitated toward the night wards, where it gained strength.

It moved on.

At first there were only a few holiday decorations visible to disturb the sterile symmetry of the hospital. But as the darkness flowed in, swiftly and silently, deeper into the inner chambers of this antiseptic fortress, more signposts of the season greeted its coming, as if it was no stranger but had been expected for a long time. Simple orange-and-black lettering gave way to animal cutouts and pointed hats, fluttering tails of paper chains pointed the way to handmade drawings and life-sized skeletons beckoning it forth. Pumpkins were everywhere in the east wing. Small ones, crooked ones, gigantic leering faces the size of ancient idols, strung along walls and doors and partitions like roadsigns. At the end of one corridor a mad jumble of primitive colors clung to the angles of an otherwise transparent, glassed-in area festooned with masses of crêpe bunting and two-dimensional black cats which arched their backs behind every cart and counter.

It was the pediatric ward.

The darkness was drawn closer, leaving flickering bulbs and buzzing sockets in its wake.

A shadow passed over the first of the cribs.

On the other side of the glass, at the nurses' station, Karen was catching up on her charting as Mrs. Alves came up beside her.

"You were late again tonight," said Mrs. Alves.

"Fifteen minutes."

"That could be the difference between life and death for one of those kids."

"You're right. I'm sorry, Mrs. Alves, I just—"

Mrs. Alves cut her off. "I don't want to hear any excuses. You're a good nurse, Karen. I'd hate to lose you. But you've got to learn to be

on time."

Karen lowered her head.

"Let's go over this list," said Mrs. Alves.

In the infant enclosure, a baby stirred. The sound it made was like a kitten stretching in its sleep.

Karen looked up.

A tiny, wrinkled pink hand with perfect miniature seashell fingernails raised in the air above one of the cribs. It retracted, and a sucking sound could be heard.

"Anything you want me to do," said Karen. "I'm really sorry."

"Carr. Mrs. Carr. Nine-thirty tomorrow morning . . ."

They compared their charts.

Unseen by either of them, a shape moved on, spreading darkness.

"I don't even know how to use this thing," said Janet disgustedly.

She was in the guard office. Mr. Garrett kept it so dim that she could hardly see what she was doing. She banged the walkie talkie against the palm of her hand.

"I'm gonna go check the pole," said Garrett. "It'll take five minutes."

He hefted the other walkie talkie and his flashlight and let himself out the back door, leaving Janet with an expression on her face that was somewhere between boredom and outright hostility. As the door sealed behind him, she sighed and shifted her weight onto one foot, holding her walkie talkie as if it were an overfull specimen beaker.

Outside, everything seemed to be in order.

Around the corner of the building the lights of the shops a quarter-mile away glimmered like stars through the mist. A few cars were parked in the hospital lot. A '57 Chevy, a Mustang convertible, others that were not familiar.

Garrett activated his walkie talkie.

"Garrett here," he said, cupping his hand unnecessarily around the mouthpiece.

"Well who else would it be?" came Janet's crackling voice from inside. *"Have you fixed it yet?"*

"We're checking it out," said Garrett in a forced monotone. "Tell Karen we've spotted her car in the lot. She better get out there next break and roll the top up. Looks like it's gonna be a foggy one."

There was a dumbfounded pause. *"Yes, sir,"* came Janet's disbelieving voice. *"Ten-four. Hurry up, will you? Mrs. Alves is waiting!"*

"Roger," said Garrett. "We copy your ten-four."

Garrett directed his attention to the structure at the back of the hospital. He followed the line of the building until the lot was cut off from his view.

He was in an outside loading dock, surrounded by cement walls and a ramp. A steel door was rolled down tight and padlocked. He spun his flashlight beam over its corrugations.

“Everything in order here, sir,” he mumbled to himself.

There was a sputtering sound.

Garrett hooked his beam up. The beam found a telephone pole and hit the ceramic insulators. A solid line of wires fed into the connectors. Unbroken. The voltage was crackling, but that was to be expected in damp weather. Nonetheless Garrett checked it out with eagle eyes, tracing each strand with his flashlight.

Not even frayed insulation.

He wrinkled his brow, puzzled.

He retraced his footsteps to the security entrance.

Suddenly there was a loud crash.

He crouched, flashlight at the ready.

A few feet away, an industrial trash bin was rocking slightly on its wheels.

Garrett tensed.

He reached for his walkie talkie, glanced back at the door, at the trash bin.

“Uh,” he said into the microphone.

“Yes? Is it fixed? Can I tell Mrs.—?”

“Never mind. Everything’s under control. Stand by.”

“But—”

He clicked off and hooked it to his belt. Sucked in his chin. Raised his flashlight like a gun.

And started for the trash bin.

His foot struck an empty medical supply carton. He avoided it as if it were a snake and nailed it with the beam. Papers, empty bottles. Pages of a catalog flapping in the breeze.

He came to the bin. DEMPSTER DUMPSTER, read the decal. The lid was closed.

He rubbed his fingertips on his jacket, inhaled, and flipped the lid up.

More cartons. Cardboard dividers. A mangled bedpan. A week’s collection of newspapers.

On the top newspaper, something wet and red.

Garrett probed for it.

With a snarl, a cat sprang out of the bin and over Garrett's shoulder. He was knocked off balance.

He almost fell into the Dempster Dumpster.

His gut jiggled as a wheezing laugh began low in his chest.

He aimed his flashlight at the cat as it darted across the open space and disappeared.

Impossible, of course. There were no exits from the concrete cul-de-sac.

Garrett followed.

His footsteps echoed around him.

He came to a door marked KEEP CLOSED.

It was open slightly.

"Locked that myself," said Garrett.

The padlock was broken.

He swabbed the crack with his beam, then pushed inside.

The big steel door rumbled like thunder. The lock swung clicking behind him.

The cone of light swept boxes and crates. Electrical parts. Tools. Clippers, shears, staple guns. They cast jagged shadows on the walls. All exactly where he had left them. At least they appeared to be. There was, however, an empty space at the end of the row of claw hammers.

"Someone gettin' into my tools again," Garrett grumbled.

He activated the walkie talkie.

"I'm gonna move into the storeroom," he announced. "The lock was out of order."

No response.

He walked on down a narrow passage. Along one wall, a series of storage closet doors.

The first one he came to had a broken latch. The padlock was nowhere in sight.

Garrett screwed up his courage, gripped the doorknob in his meaty fist, clenched his teeth and pulled.

A shape fell on him.

A carton of medical supplies. Small, elongated plastic packages scattered over him.

He hefted his communicator. "Somebody's been into the OR-9's," he reported. "Don't look like staff this time. The lock was busted." He groaned to his feet.

"Mr. Garrett?"

“Stand by.”

He was holding to a supply cabinet. Its lock, too, had been broken. Twisted off, as if by someone with superhuman strength.

He proceeded deeper into the storage hall.

“Better call Brackett’s boys for this one,” he said. “Do you read? Acknowledge, Janet, damn you, girl! I’m not playing around now. Someone’s—”

Before he could finish, the next door in line burst open at his back and tall blackness flowed out. He didn’t even have time to get his flashlight up.

“Mr. Garrett? Mr. Garrett . . . ?”

The walkie talkie bounced on the concrete floor and cracked open. Janet’s voice continued to filter out weakly, weaker, and was finally cut off as a heavy, very heavy foot came down on it, stepped over Garrett with utter unconcern, and lumbered away.

Mr. Garrett had found his missing claw hammer.

“Where is Janet? I sent her to check with Mr. Garrett half an hour ago. And now I can’t get ahold of either one of them unless I go down there myself. The phones are still on the fritz.”

“Do you want me to find out for you, Mrs. Alves?” offered Karen without enthusiasm.

Mrs. Alves tapped her pencil on the metal cover of a chart and pinched the bridge of her nose. “I can’t really spare you, Karen. What if there’s another emergency admission? This is a small hospital. I wouldn’t be able to leave the children unattended.”

“Whatever you say, Mrs. Alves.”

The head nurse tested the phone again. She punched buttons with her pencil, gave up, exasperated. “There’s no way I can get either one of them. I can’t even page them. Well I definitely cannot have any more of this after tonight. This is most certainly not the way to run a hospital. Remember that, Karen.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“It must be my eyes, but does it seem to be getting darker in here to you?”

“I hadn’t noticed, ma’am.”

“It’s my age. That’s another thing for you to remember, Karen. Don’t get old. It doesn’t make for efficiency.”

“Ma’am? Excuse me, but is that a *party?”*

Loud voices and footsteps reverberated off the walls at the end of a spotless corridor.

"It certainly sounds like one, doesn't it?" Mrs. Alves set down the chart and straightened her hat. "We'll just have to see about that."

She marched off.

"Bud, you fool," whispered Karen, "if that's you . . . !"

Karen was alone. On the other side of the glassed-in room babies struggled in fitful sleep. Karen's own face hung reflected in the glass, lighted by the orange pumpkin on the desk. It was beginning to smolder and stink a bit as hot wax melted further and further down inside. Karen wrinkled her nose. She reached for the pumpkin to throw it out or at least to move it. As her hand sank into the warm, softened sides, she glanced up.

A shadow loomed behind her in the glass.

She spun around.

"How's Laurie doin'?" said Jimmy.

"Oh! Jimmy, you scared the shit out of me! Don't do things like that. It's hard enough working the graveyard shift."

"What am I supposed to do, knock?"

"Keep your voice down. You'll wake the children."

"Well?"

"About Laurie Strode? They finally got her to sleep. You'll have to talk to Mrs. Alves."

Jimmy's eyes narrowed intensely. "Oh, great. They weren't supposed to do that."

Karen laughed. "And why not? She's in shock, Jimmy. Do you know what that means?"

"Yes, I know what that means."

"Sleep's the best thing for her."

"Where's Mrs. Alves now? In with Laurie?"

"No. There was some kind of commotion. She went to—"

"I know. A TV crew just drove up. They must want to talk to Laurie."

"They'll have to get through Mrs. Alves first."

"Yeah." Jimmy bit his thumbnail. "I'm gonna go check it out. See you later, Karen."

" 'Bye." She leaned against the counter and kicked off one of her shoes. "Oh, and if you see Bud, tell him . . ."

But it was too late. Jimmy was already at the end of the hall.

Karen breathed wearily and yawned. "Nice guy," she said to herself. "Too nice. Laurie Strode, look out." She toed back into her shoe and made an effort to appear busy.

As Jimmy rounded the corner, was that a shadow in the fire doorway that led down to the basement? Karen leaned around the smelly pumpkin, trying to see.

"Ooh, when do we get to throw these damned things out? They give me the creeps . . ."

She sat. The corridor was clean and empty. The doors were closed. The neon lights hummed reassuringly, erasing any shadows she might have thought she had seen.

She lifted her hair and massaged the back of her own neck awkwardly. "Bud," she said, "oh, Bud. Where are you when I need you?"

A full-fledged argument was in progress.

Jimmy sidled up next to Janet and Jill. Janet was overwrought, as always, perhaps a bit more so than usual right now. She was waiting to get Mrs. Alves' attention. But the head nurse was facing down the camera crew, as immovable as a master sergeant.

"No cameras allowed inside the hospital," she was saying. "Those are the rules. So just pack up your gear and move out of here."

A young man in a jacket liner folded his arms. "Debra told us to meet her here. Didn't she work everything out? She's the producer of Eyeline News. She's—"

"Doesn't matter who she is. Rules are rules."

"We wanted to get a reaction from the Strode girl about Michael Myers' death," said a man in a color-coordinated suit. It was Robert Mundy, the local news personality. He modulated into his most oleaginous voice, oozing charm.

To which Mrs. Alves was impervious. "Sorry, but you'll have to leave right now. Don't make me call Security."

The cameramen gave up and started breaking down their equipment.

Janet buttonholed Mrs. Alves. "Mr. Garrett said to tell you to call the police."

"What?"

"Yes, ma'am. Somebody broke into—"

"Are the phones fixed?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Alves. I'm trying to tell you. He's still outside working on them, the last I heard. But he said to tell you . . ."

Jimmy elbowed through to Mundy, the announcer.

"Michael Myers is dead? They're sure now it was him?" repeated Jimmy.

The announcer showed his sandbagged teeth automatically, as if he were on camera. “About twenty minutes ago. A policeman nailed him —literally.”

Mrs. Alves’ voice rose. “All right, let’s go! Come on!” She ushered them all back down the hallway.

“Are you sure he’s dead?” asked Jimmy.

“Oh, yeah,” said Mundy. “They don’t come any deader. He burned up alive. Car wreck. Say, do you think Debra might be outside, trying to get in?”

“Debra who?”

“I thought everybody knew Debra.” Mundy laid a manicured hand on Jimmy’s shoulder. “Are you in the industry?”

Laurie lay in semi-darkness in her safe white hospital bed, listening to her heartbeat.

From time to time footsteps passed in the hall. Each time she prayed for them to pass by and her heart speeded up. Then, when she heard that they were the regular, businesslike footsteps of the night staff, she turned hopefully to the small wire-glass window in her door and waited for someone to stop. But each time they passed by. That, too, made her heart speed up. She did not know which was worse—the trapped loneliness from which she could not free herself, or the fear that someone or something she could not name might find her here and enter her room.

I know what I’ll do, she thought. I’ll lock the door and let in only that nice woman, Mrs. Alves, or one of the other nurses.

Or Jimmy.

But the door had no lock.

She tossed on the pillow in despair. I can’t go to sleep. Because if I do the dream will come again.

It was an arid, suffocating dream, filled with a hideous light so bright it caused time to stop and left her hanging suspended, unable to make contact with anyone or anything. And then the shadows would begin to creep in, dissolving the light and threatening to devour her.

Like the shape that could shuffle to a stop outside her room at any moment.

And if she were to fall asleep, she would not even have a chance to run to the window. If she could manage to get that far.

Cold tears of fear squeezed out of her eyes. She rolled her head—

Now. Someone was coming now. She could feel it, through the floor and up through the tight sheets. The I.V. tube that fed into her arm

began to sway in the moonlight.

She held her breath, trying to quiet her heart.

A voice came to her through the glass. Close, already here.

“Jimmy, don’t! You’re gonna get in trouble.” It was the blonde nurse. Jill, her name badge had said.

Yes. Jill was nice. She helped that doctor and Mrs. Alves when I was first brought here. How long ago was it?

“It’s okay. Mrs. Alves is busy.”

That was Jimmy’s voice. Good Jimmy. She raised her head.

He was standing in the doorway. Even in the backlight his eyes were clear and shining. Warm.

She wet her lips to speak.

“It’s okay,” said Jimmy. “Everything’s okay.”

He always made it sound so simple.

“What time is it?” she said.

He ignored her question as if it didn’t matter. It must not matter, she thought. Why am I worrying about a thing like that?

“The police got Michael Myers,” he told her. “He’s dead, Laurie. You don’t have anything more to worry about.”

He sounded as if he really believed it. “He’s not dead,” she told him.

“He *is*, Laurie. I just talked to a reporter. He was in some kind of accident.”

“He didn’t die.” She tried but could not raise her voice above a whisper. “He’s still out there. You’ve got to believe me.”

“It’s over, Laurie. It’s all over.”

When she kicked the sheet off and worked her leg over the edge of the bed, he was there to hold her back.

“No, he’s still out there! I know he is—I *know* it! You don’t know. You think you know but you don’t. You’ve got to help me! I’ve got to get out of here!”

She fought him. Why would he stop her? Doesn’t he understand? No, he doesn’t. He couldn’t. *He didn’t see*.

Jimmy restrained her gently. She could feel that he did not want to hurt her. But the more she pushed, the stronger his arms became. It was as if there was no limit to his strength; as much as he needed to keep her here would be his. She was as unable now to summon the strength needed to free herself from danger as she had ever been. It’s not the wounds, she realized. It’s me. I’m weak. I need people to protect me—I always have. God damn them! Well, there *are* no people to protect me, not now and not ever. I’ve got to do it myself. I’ve got to—

“Laurie, cut it out.”

“He—he’ll find me here! Yes! It’s true! You’ve got to help me. Please help me!”

Jimmy called over his shoulder. “Jill!”

Running feet, rubber soles against the linoleum. Two nurses’ caps in the doorway. Jill and the other one, the dark one. Perhaps one of them would listen. There was no more time; it had to be now before the night got any darker.

“I’ve got to get out! I’ve got to . . . !”

“Go get Dr. Mixter,” commanded Jimmy, “quick!”

“Stay with her,” said Jill. “I’ll get Mrs. Alves.”

Laurie collapsed against Jimmy with sobs that tore painfully inside her.

“Take it easy. Everything’s going to be okay.”

Even though it hurt so, she could not stop herself from sobbing, not even when the others came running in.

The lights went on.

Dr. Mixter’s voice: “Jill, get me five milligrams of Diazepam.”

A cold wetness on her arm. The acrid smell of alcohol sliced her nostrils.

“No, don’t put me to sleep! He’ll find me!”

She opened her eyes wide. A long silver needle streaked toward her arm. Her wrist was held down and—

Everything stopped as, soundlessly, every light in the rooms, the hallway and the building was snuffed out.

“Oh no,” said a voice.

She sat there in darkness, her body twisted, the pressure on her arms and legs, the tearing pain in her shoulder. Their eyes were bluish-white in the moonlight that washed in on them all. No one moved. Laurie remained tensed against the piercing of the needle. Which did not come.

“Everyone stay as you were,” said Dr. Mixter. “The emergency generator will kick in. It has to.”

RED
DREAMS

CHAPTER

Eight

“This is difficult.”

And it was. Loomis watched the dentist, Graham, stooping over a charred body, probing like a scrimshaw artist at a row of still-hot teeth.

Next to him, Deputy Hunt wadded a handkerchief to his nose to keep from being sick.

The dentist scraped blackened deposits from molars and wiped his probe on the sheet.

“Even the gums are charred. Look here.” He wielded a flat-bladed tool and cut away clotted blood and tissue. “See here?” The man abraded a tooth all the way down to its roots in the socket. The blade squeaked grittily. “No fillings.”

Loomis’ nostrils flared. Even the air conditioner and the blowing scent of green soap and formaldehyde could not mask the stench of boiled entrails and rank organs.

“He’s young,” said the dentist. He excised a crisp strand of jaw muscle and laid it in the pan like a burnt anchovy. “Maybe seventeen, maybe eighteen.”

Loomis said, “Michael Myers was twenty-one.”

“A positive ID means we check X-rays and dental records.” Graham looked up. His scalpel slipped and skittered up the skull to where the nose had been. The blade caught in the sharp edges of the burned-out cavity; a last remaining squib of gristle broke off from the skull and rolled into one of the drainage holes in the autopsy table.

“That will take hours,” said Loomis.

“No other way to know for sure. I’m sorry.” Graham smiled helplessly at Loomis, showing his teeth, and adjusted his eyeglasses with a sooty rubber glove.

“We haven’t got hours.” Loomis paced, seeing the scales for weighing, the jars of preserved kidneys and intestines, the plastic bags full of tagged appendages. On top of a purring refrigerator, a floating brain segment shivered like molded gelatin. “Listen to me.” His voice rose with fatigue. “We’ve got to assume that Michael Myers is still alive.”

There was a clacking in the hall. The doors swung wide and another patrolman approached the deputy, Hunt.

Hunt diverted him from the table. “Everybody goes back, out.”

“But we just closed it up,” said the patrolman.

“I want a sweep from Chestnut south to the bypass. Every street, every house, every back yard.”

The patrolman held out his hands to object but thought better of it. Hunt’s eyes were red but unblinking above the handkerchief.

“Okay. You got it.” The patrolman left.

Hunt’s eyes met Loomis’ and bored into him.

“Thank you,” Loomis said.

At Hunt’s back, a life-sized anatomy chart covered part of one wall. Loomis saw the graphic veins and arteries that flow in infinite complexity throughout a human being, each delicate connection originating from something called the heart. As small and nondescript as that organ was, it dominated the entire picture and seemed to give the pattern meaning.

Hunt lowered the handkerchief, his eyes never leaving Loomis. “I knew Annie Brackett,” he said with difficulty. “The other kids, too. And now there may be another boy lying on this slab here who died because of you. So don’t thank me, doctor. Just help me find him.”

“All right,” said Loomis. But the deputy had already left the room.

Graham was preocuppied with sorting his tools. As he packed them away he hummed a tune, oblivious to the grisly, grinning witness next to him on the table. There gaped a ribcage opened by tongues of fire; here a hand whose fingers were melted to stumps; and there a legbone contorted like a blackened pipe-cleaner, ending in a foot that was a lump of coal. The skull with its jawbone opened wide to the examination light in a last searing scream, unable to close ever again.

The dentist eyed Loomis curiously.

“You can go now,” said Loomis.

“What about my fee? Shall I send the bill to the HPD, or to—?”

“I don’t care what you do,” said Loomis with unconcealed contempt.

Then he was out the swinging doors of the coroner’s office, after Hunt.

Karen was sorting tomorrow’s medication, dropping colored pills into a trayful of little paper cups, when every light in the hospital went out.

“Oh!” She let a yelp out of her throat and froze. Her hands shook, tapping the paper cups.

She waited as her eyes opened to the sunspot of orange light bouncing on the ceiling. It came from the top of the pumpkin.

Then there was a rumbling in the walls as the emergency generator cut in. The sealed bulbs buzzed overhead, restarting, and an interrupted line of light advanced toward her along the corridor.

Dark areas remained by some of the doors; the emergency generator was equipped to handle only half-power, so that every second light remained off to conserve energy where it was needed most. The floor now appeared to be inlaid in an unfamiliar checkerboard pattern of black and white.

She returned as best she could to her sorting. The pills she held had begun to dissolve in the sweat of her palms. She dropped them into the waste basket and started over.

Janet came running, a white shape at the end of the hall.

She panted as she came up. "Have you seen Mr. Garrett?"

"No, I haven't. Why don't you call him?"

"The phones are still out of order. He's supposed to be fixing them. I don't know what's taking him so long. What a night, huh?"

"What happened to the lights?"

"I don't know. But you want to hear something really creepy?" Janet was vaguely disheveled. A strand of hair was pasted to her forehead.

"What?" Karen set the tray aside.

"Somebody broke into the storeroom. Mr. Garrett said some stuff was gone."

"He probably took it himself."

"I don't think it's funny," Janet persisted. "It's just real creepy."

"Why? What was missing?"

"Hypodermic needles!"

Karen laughed nervously. "Oh, that must have been Bud."

"That's not very funny, either."

"Hey, take it easy, Jan."

"Yeah, well, Mrs. Alves sent me to talk to Mr. Garrett, and I still can't find him. Has he come by here recently?"

"No. This place is deader 'n an Iowa State Picnic."

Janet was racing. "Yeah, and I can't find Mrs. Alves now, either! It's creepy, I tell you!"

"Take a Valium, Janet. You're getting all pushed out of shape over nothing."

"Easy for you to say. You didn't hear Laurie Strode screaming about

how Michael Myers is still out there—how he's coming to get her!"

"I thought he was dead," said Karen edgily.

"He is. She just flipped out." She was making an effort to calm herself, but the words tumbled out. "I'm telling you, it's pretty creepy." She bit down. "Anyway. I gotta go."

"See you later," said Karen.

Karen watched her disappear into the next corridor. Then she blew a hair away from her nose, pulled her neckline out and blew down, ventilating her uniform. She resumed her pill-sorting at half-speed.

Her hands were shaking.

"One yellow," she reminded herself, "one red-and-gray . . ."

An emergency call buzzer went off.

She dropped the pills, bumping the counter and breaking one of her nails.

"I'm coming," she said. "I'm coming already, don't have kittens . . ."

She collected the pills and deposited them in one jar. Put the lid on the jar. Rearranged the tray. Grabbed the rubber noose of her stethoscope and went up the corridor, away from pediatrics.

With so many of the hall lights out, the signal near the ceiling flashed with an unusually bright urgency.

She checked the door, but there was no patient name on it.

She bit at her broken nail. The glass observation panel in the door was absolutely dark.

"Mrs. Alves," she said to herself, "where are you?"

She grasped the knob.

The door budged an inch, then stopped. It was not locked. But something was blocking it from the other side.

She set her heel against the floor and pushed harder.

The door gave and opened wide.

There was a breathing in the room.

The white shape of a patient lying on the bed. The sheet rising, falling.

She tiptoed all the way in, groped to adjust the edge of the bedding.

At that moment the shape under the sheet grabbed her. Her scream was cut off by a hand. Another hand, a very strong hand, flipped her onto her back and held her down. Her eyes widened. The hand was over her mouth. She couldn't breathe. She opened her teeth and bit as hard as she could. The sheet fell away.

"Shit!"

She stared in horror at Bud.

“You—you idiot!” she sputtered.

Bud sucked his finger. “You coulda broken it!”

“I wish I had.”

“Had your rabies shot lately? Jesus, baby, that hurts!”

Karen showed him what she had in her uniform pocket. “I also could have used these on you!” A small pair of hook-nosed scissors. “What an asshole!”

“Happy Halloween,” said Bud mirthlessly.

Karen climbed off the bed. “You’re the biggest jerk I’ve ever known, Bud.”

He grinned sheepishly. “But you love me.”

“I’m an idiot.”

“Let’s go down to the therapy room. Bud’s finger needs some . . . therapy.”

Karen caught her breath. She softened against her will. “I can’t leave the kids now.”

“Ka-ren . . .”

“We have to wait until Marlowe comes on.”

“That’s another three hours. Bud can’t wait.”

“Bud’ll have to.”

She was standing with her knees touching the bed. Bud crawled closer. “Everybody’s all weirded-out tonight,” he said. “All this Michael Myers crap. I just want to get away for a little while—”

“What happened with the lights?”

“They go out about twice a week, remember?” he said in his most reasonable voice. He touched her wrist. “Come on. The therapy room’s only three doors down.”

“Bud,” she said, her voice rising and falling on mixed emotions.

“Think about it.” He stroked the inside of her arm, up under the sleeve.

“I can’t.”

“Everybody else is in the east wing, right?” he argued. “All weirded-out, right?”

Karen looked at him in the dimness from the hall. She pursed her lips. “If we left the door open we could hear someone coming. Or if one of the kids started to cry.” She sounded like she was convincing herself.

“Exactly.”

“I have to check things out first.”

“Fifteen minutes.”

The floor was silent except for the restless dreaming of babies in their cribs.

"*If* everything's okay."

"So go," said Bud. "You're wastin' time."

As she left he fell back on the bed, sucking his finger.

A strange scene was in progress at the old Myers house.

As Hunt's car arrived at the curb, the crowd had already become a mob. A black-uniformed policeman catwalking the second story roof with gun at the ready was covering his head, dodging rocks.

Hunt and Loomis got out.

A beer bottle sailed out of the crowd and shattered a window next to the policeman. He crouched and shouted at them. They shouted back louder.

Hunt trained his searchlight at the roof to encircle the officer.

That only made him a better target. Obscenities rang out from both sides. In the beam of the searchlight fists were raised, angry faces snarled at the new arrivals.

Like something I saw in a movie once, thought Loomis, appalled. I thought scenes like this went out with nineteenth-century villages. Any second now they'll be lighting torches and calling for blood.

Hunt uncoiled his radio microphone. "This is Hunt!" he said, yelling to be heard. They were all out now, teenagers, neighbors, the whole block by the look of it. "Send another vehicle. Forty-five Lampkin Lane."

"The tribe," said Loomis. "One of their number was butchered. This is the wake."

He rechecked the chamber of his .357 as Hunt unlocked his riot gun from the dashboard.

"Heightens my sense of security," said Loomis.

"All right, all right, knock it off!" shouted Hunt. He held his shotgun like a baton and forced a way through the crowd.

Loomis felt that he was running a gauntlet.

There were more officers inside the house than he would have guessed there were in the whole of Haddonfield. They were sifting through every square inch of the place.

Better late than never.

The patrolman from the coroner's office came up. His badge glinted in the crisscrossing flashlights.

"Empty," he announced to Hunt. "Plus we covered the whole east

end of town, Gary. Nothing."

"Check it again."

"He just ain't here!"

"I said, check it again."

The patrolman took two men and the three of them fought their way back out to the street.

Hunt turned on Loomis.

"Haddonfield was a pretty quiet town," he said, "until tonight. The only gunshots you ever heard were to start the track meet at the high school." He shook out a Marlboro, lit it with a yellow Cricket lighter. As an afterthought he offered Loomis one.

They walked around to one side, away from the natives.

"And yet," said Loomis distantly, lighting up, "one night in 1963, Michael Myers did murder his sister in that upstairs bedroom. With a large butcher knife."

"I remember," said Hunt.

"It was on Halloween . . ."

"I was sixteen years old."

Loomis was aware of a new feeling insinuating itself into his consciousness, a sense of continuity that linked his life with the life of Hunt and the others in this town. Though he had not known them or the town directly until now, it was true that they had an unholy alliance, himself and this square-cut young man and his partners; it was almost a complicity. By this alone were they now united here, remembering, marking similar milestones in their lives, however different those lives might have been.

Fifteen years ago, thought Loomis. What might I be now if not for Michael Myers? I stayed with him, naively trying to help. And Hunt, he took a different course after that night. He responded in a way I should have all along. He armed himself with firepower.

"It's his anniversary, Mr. Hunt." As it is for all of us, he thought, the date of our blood bondage. "He came back."

"After fifteen years?"

"He waited with extraordinary patience." Loomis was quite surprised to find himself explaining how it had been for him, miles from Haddonfield but always fated to be here one day, this day, along with the other parallel lives, aimed from the beginning toward a convergence none of them could have known anything about. Myself included; myself most of all. Only the Evil knew. He always knew.

"There was a force inside him, biding its time," he went on, smoking his cigarette against the stars. "The staff grew accustomed to

his immobility and silence. In many ways he was the ideal patient. He didn't talk, he didn't cry, he didn't even move. He just waited. The staff was unprepared. They," he finished recounting, "didn't know what he was."

The twin arcs of their cigarettes moved like shooting stars over the Illinois porch.

"Did you know?" asked Hunt. There was no accusation in his voice. It was too late for that, and this policeman was nothing if not pragmatic.

"Yeah," said Loomis bitterly, "I knew."

I always knew. It was my belief, not my knowledge that failed. My faith, that primitive impulse for survival that our modern world has taken from us, leaving us what we are now: alone and lost, trying to set it right and make it back through the darkest part of the night to morning.

Two teenaged boys ran up.

"Mr. Hunt?"

"Yeah, what is it, Craig?"

"I'm worried about Bennett Trainer."

"He's not home yet," said the second boy.

"Yeah, he left the party at ten."

Hunt consuited his watch. "It's only a little after eleven, boys."

"He was real drunk," said the second boy.

Loomis had a sense of foreboding. "How old was he?"

"Seventeen," said the first boy.

"He had this stupid mask on," said the second boy.

Hunt and Loomis avoided each other's eyes. "We're scared something happened to him."

"All right, boys," said Hunt.

"Mr. Hunt?" said the first boy. "I—I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell my dad I was at a party tonight . . ."

Hunt nodded. "Go on home now. We'll take care of it."

Loomis watched them lope away. "Seventeen," he said, "and wearing a mask."

"Oh God," said Hunt.

"We'd better check *his* dental records."

A patrolman came around the side of the house.

"Old Reservoir Road!" called the patrolman. "They got a break-in at the elementary school. They're pretty sure it's him."

Loomis pitched his cigarette away. It hit the street in a shower of

sparks.

"Come on!"

Karen had to take off her shoes in order to keep from slipping.

The therapy room was filling up with steam. It permeated her uniform and condensed in her stockings, rose up to the ceiling and began to rain back down along the white tiles in rivulets, flowing into mirages under the exercise machines and walking bars.

She slogged over to the stainless steel tub.

Bud was buoyed back on his elbows. He had a look of absolute spoiled indulgence.

She kicked her toes through a puddle, sprinkling his face.

His eyelids opened lazily.

"Hurry up," he said with a dopey smile.

"I don't want to wrinkle my uniform." She hiked up her skirt and skinned off her panty hose. She stood over him with the shrunken nylons in her hand.

Bud dunked his head under the churning surface and came up red as a lobster.

"Well?" he said. He reached for her ankle.

She dodged his hand. She watched him float over one of the jets. His hairy legs lifted, his kneecaps breaking the surface like bald heads. The roseate of his genitals bobbed on the water.

"Well?" she said.

The steam was rising.

Karen held to the rail and tiptoed to the control room.

The glass was misted over. Bud stretched out in the tub. He was a pink blur through the window. He said something to her, but his voice was muffled by the double safety panes. With that and the clouds of steam which now enclosed the tub, they would be very much alone even if someone were to walk into this part of the room from the hall, which was not likely at this hour. She stripped and folded her clothing on a shelf under the heating pipes. She set her stethoscope careful on top of the pile.

The gauge indicated 104 degrees, the perfect temperature.

Back in the tiled area once more, the rumbling of the aerators effectively blocked every sound of the world outside this room. Billows of steam licked invitingly from the sunken tub. She pinned back her hair and descended.

The water closed around her neck.

Bud's hands were slippery fishes darting over her hips and thighs. Their toes nipped at each other. The changing waterline tilted in front of her and merged with the misty white skyline of the ceramic floor beyond.

If the door to the control room had opened and closed, neither of them noticed.

Eventually Bud gripped her more demandingly around the waist and lifted her up into the hot air. A stream of bubbles rolled up her spine.

She separated from him. "It's getting hotter in here," she observed.

"That's me," said Bud.

"You wish."

"I know." He encircled her and nuzzled her breasts.

She pushed him away again. Her fingers squeegeed his hair. "I'm not kidding. It's too hot now."

Bud tried to hold her ankles with his in a frog leg lock.

Karen tossed her head. "Check it, Bud," she said, using her impersonal nurse's voice.

"That gauge is stuck on a hundred and five. It hasn't moved. Nobody could move it. I know—I tried it when I got here. It would take King Kong to budge it. It must be wrong. Besides, baby, it's cold out there."

"It can get cold in here."

"Gotcha," said Bud resignedly. He got out of the tub, deflated.

He flat-footed it to the control room.

He went inside. It was hot in the glass room, too, though silent as the door closed. Karen was a hazy blur from here. Her clothes were piled neatly under the controls. He smiled.

"Where's your stethoscope, little girl? Lost it again, huh? Old Lady Alves is gonna start taking them out of your paycheck . . ."

He wiped the misty gauge with wet fingers. It read 122 degrees.

"Wha-a-at?" said Bud. "Can't be right."

He touched the knob, drew his hand away and kissed his fingers. It was hot. "What the . . . ?"

As he stood there massaging his chest hairs into a swirl, the temperature needle crept up another notch.

124 degrees and inching into the red zone.

He grabbed a towel and reached for the valve.

A shadow passed over the gauge.

He looked up. And up.

The temperature gauge crept up to 127 degrees.

But he could not have seen it.

Karen ignored the misty activity in the control room. Bud's arms were jerking in the shadows.

"Yank that thing, big man," she said, turning her back. "You've got strong hands. I know you can do it."

She sat on the edge of the tub and folded her arms under her dripping breasts. The water humped as if boiling.

Behind her, the door to the control room opened.

She snagged a towel and dabbed her neck and shoulders. She lifted the hair away from her face with her red fingernails. She fanned the steam. It was becoming difficult to breathe. The back of her neck trickled with perspiration. She dabbed it again.

A hand touched her.

"Bud, forget it. I have to get back to work."

The hand stayed where it was.

Her big toe dipped into a mound of aeration. She jerked her foot away.

"Ow, that's hotter than ever! Did you even do anything? We sure can't go back in now."

The hand slid around her neck to the hollow of her throat.

"Mmm. You want to go for breakfast later?"

She took the hand in her hands and drew it down to her breastbone and closed her eyes. The fingertips brushed her nipple.

She sighed. "I'm sorry. I just have to get back, that's all." Eyes closed, she licked the finger, sucked it.

There was no response.

"Come on, Bud, don't be this way . . ."

She stopped what she was doing. The fingers were dirty. Filthy.

She opened her eyes to the wrist, the arm—

To what was behind her.

Instantly she was bent in half and driven forward. Before she hit the water she wrenched around far enough to see Bud sprawled nude on the tiles of the control room, a stethoscope—her own—knotted across his Adam's apple. Then she was forced down and up and down. One, two, three, four, five, six times. Each time she was hauled up by the hair her face was redder and more blistered, until her bubbling, choking screams ceased and there was only the hissing and the patient, silent, curious shadow leaning over her, observing.

Finally it dropped her and left her there, half-in and half-out, her arms and one leg floating gracefully on the roiling waves, the skin of

her face and breasts boiled and peeling loose in long, dangling strips.

Then the shape stepped over her and moved on.

Back out into the hospital corridor.

It had not been difficult at all.

CHAPTER
Nine

How they changed, Laurie thought.

There had been a crackling and then every light in the hall, the hospital and the world, it seemed, went out all at once.

Laurie had stopped resisting because hands were no longer forcing her back into the bed. Yet they did not release her.

“Hold her.” Dr. Mixter’s voice.

“I’ll have a talk with—”

A rumbling in the walls, an almost subaudible electric pressure.

“—with Mr. Garrett about this,” finished Mrs. Alves.

Just as suddenly, emergency power returned. Some of the lights in the hall stayed off. The few that reactivated now outlined Mrs. Alves’ head so that it appeared much larger than before.

She advanced on Laurie with an unreal modeling to her features as dim light leaked through her hair. Someone thought of the table lamp. It clicked and clicked uselessly. Only the moonlight through the blinds remained constant, and it was a distant, storybook kind of lighting that hid as much as it revealed.

“That’s it,” said Dr. Mixter, his face huge over the bed. “Easy.” His cheeks were hollow and craggy, Laurie saw now, his temples scarred with pockmarks. His eyes were black and unreadable under heavy anthropoid brows.

The cold stab of the needle in her vein . . .

That was how it was.

But this is supposed to be a hospital, she thought, returning to the present. The safest place there is.

If that’s true, why didn’t I feel safe when they brought me here? And why don’t I feel safe now?

That question had been answered a few minutes ago.

It was the people, the doctors and nurses. They seemed friendly enough in the beginning. Pretending to be interested in my welfare. Like mothers and fathers.

But that was a lie, too, like all the lies down the years. Oh, they answer your questions as long as you don’t ask the really important ones. Then they turn out your light and tuck you in so tight you can’t

move and tell you to go to sleep whether you want to or not. If you see things, they tell you it's only a dream. If you dream too much, they tell you not to do that, either. Finally they don't want to listen. They try to make you feel guilty for being afraid.

That's the way it has always been for me, as long as I can remember.

Nothing has changed.

When I was in sixth grade, I thought it would be different once I got to junior high. In eighth grade, I could hardly wait to be a freshman in high school. Then I was a sophomore. By the time I was a junior I knew for sure it was an illusion. I'll never know the answers, at least not enough of them to be safe.

Maybe when I'm older, out on my own, married?

No.

She put that from her mind, too. Now when does it seem that I'll know? Twenty-one? Thirty? Forty? Ever? What a fool I've been, waiting. It's like a rainbow: as soon as you get close to the pot of gold, the end moves farther away. It always has. It always will.

I wonder if my grandmother knows? She must be in her sixties. I'll bet she doesn't. I wish I could ask her, or at least tell her that it's the same for me, too. Why won't they let me see her? They change the subject like they're embarrassed whenever I bring her up; they won't even tell me her name. As if not knowing the name could make someone less real. I know she's real. I almost remember. Almost . . .

She drifted on a cloud of drugs, leaving her hospital bed behind.

She wanted to tell her friends right now, tomorrow, that it was all a game. As soon as she could get out of here she would. *Don't wait any longer*, she heard herself yelling in the daylight that would come. Don't put off your life, school or no school. College next year? Yes, if you want to. But don't do it because you think it's going to make you any wiser; don't use it as an excuse. The time you have is precious. You'll never know more than you do now, I promise . . .

It was as clear to her as the knowledge that she was finally on her own.

Completely, from now on. Mom and Dad can come here if they want to. It will be easier, seeing them. But it won't really make any difference. They hadn't been able to help her when she needed them most. There was no reason to assume they ever would again.

For the first time in her life she accepted and embraced her lot.

It was like an opening up, not like a loss.

I wonder if it would be easier for Annie or Lynda if they knew? It's the secret everyone's moving toward discovering all through life. They

don't know it. They only know that parents can't do it forever, if they ever did. That's why Annie's got Tommy, Lynda's got Bob now . . .

She wanted to tell them that Tommy and Bob won't be able to help them, either, not in any way that really counts, when the time comes that you need help most. Love them for what they are and be grateful for that, but don't expect them to save you. They can't—they're waiting for someone to do the same for them. Don't you get it?

Annie and Lynda . . .

Her friends' faces drifted in the air over her bed. She could almost hear them if she listened closely enough:

. . . *Totally insane!* Lynda was saying, lost in her world of school and partying. Was it only yesterday? *We have three new cheers to learn in the morning, the game in the afternoon, I get my hair done at five, and the dance is at eight. I'll be totally wiped out!*

I forgot my chemistry book, Laurie heard herself saying.

It totally doesn't matter, she wanted to tell herself.

So who cares? Lynda again, crazy Lynda. *I always forget my chemistry book, and my math book and my English book and my, let's see, my French book and, oh, who needs books, anyway? I don't need books. I always forget all of my books. I mean, it doesn't really matter if you have your books or not . . .*

I don't need to tell her that it's a game, Laurie realized. She already knows it.

Maybe she even knows how bad things can get. Like what happened last night. Maybe that's why she's always laughing.

And Annie?

Good, kind, funny Annie. *This has not been my night. My clothes are in the wash, I spilled butter down the front of me, I got stuck in a window . . .*

Annie, she thought. Annie, you're right. I want to tell you that I know it now, too. It *doesn't* make any sense. It's crazy, all of it, our lives. You're right! There are things out there, aren't there, Annie? terrible things coming that we'll never be ready for no matter how long we wait. We *should* make a joke out of everything, bitch to the high heavens . . . it's the only way to keep from flipping out.

I wish I had, she thought. That boy I went out with last month. He told me I talk like a book. And you know what? He was right.

And for what? All my studying didn't do me any good tonight. It didn't save me.

That funny little man in the trenchcoat saved me, I don't know why. And I never even knew him.

Annie, she thought. Lynda. I thought I knew more than you. But I was so wrong.

She wanted to tell them that, lying there half-awake in the blue dark.

Annie. And Lynda.

Laurie gave up and drifted.

The bed melted away and she was flying. Over the trees, the housetops of Haddonfield. There was the high school, miles below. "E" building, Mrs. Eddington's Junior English Class. And there was Laurie herself sitting by the window, doodling in her composition book. Dreaming herself out the window. Barely listening.

Can you see me? thought Laurie, flying over. Can you see what's happened to us?

Her own voice rose up to her on the air, as clear and precise as a silver bell. What was she saying?

". . . Costaine wrote that fate was somehow related only to religion, where Samuels felt that fate was like a natural element . . . like earth, air, fire and water . . ."

She saw herself waiting for the teacher's approval.

"That's right," said the teacher, *"Samuels definitely personified fate. In Samuels' writing fate is immovable, like a mountain. It stands where man passes away. Fate never changes . . ."*

School, she thought, drifting higher. It seemed so far away from her now.

"He got in here."

The third grade schoolroom contained exactly what was to be expected: rows of desks, pictures painted to oversized proportions with coarse brushes and garish tempera to paper the walls. But as Loomis scrutinized the room, he made out at once the details that set it apart from other classrooms at the school.

He stepped gingerly to the windows, following the beam of a patrolman's flashlight. He heard Hunt's shoes crunching the floor.

Beneath a locked window was a pile of broken glass. The pieces lay like sharp diamonds reflecting the yellow beam. The knifelike edges of the window pane transformed the lights of the police cars outside into angular red slashes.

"And look over here . . ."

Up the aisles. The desks were so small.

Could Michael Myers ever have fitted behind one of them?

Yes.

Was this the very same desk, the one with still-wet blood dripped on it?

The trail of blood led them to a larger desk. The teacher's. A curled drawing, signed RANDI, lay on the desk. There was blood splashed on the paper.

The drawing depicted a family outing. The sun took up a third of the paper, sprouting joyous rays. Crooked green crayon lines to indicate grass. A brown dog with a long tongue curving out of its louvered snout. Five human figures, all round heads with dotted features and stick-figure arms and legs, hands joined. Crescent smiles.

A large kitchen knife pinned the drawing to the desk, impaling the smallest female character.

"Is that it?" said Hunt impatiently.

"No," said the patrolman. Flashlight up.

"Here. Up here. On the blackboard."

Hunt: "What's this?"

"It's gibberish."

Loomis felt the hairs on the back of his neck rising like quills.

"S-A-M-H-A-I-N," read Hunt. "What is it, somebody's name? Check and see if there's a Sam—"

"That's not chalk," said Loomis. "Look here. It's written in blood."

"Does the name mean anything to you?"

"It's a Celtic word. 'Samhain.' The Lord of the Dead. The end of summer. The Festival of Samhain. October thirty-first."

"He didn't write that. He couldn't write, could he?"

Who knows? thought Loomis. "Don't underestimate him," he said.

"Jesus, how could we now?" said Hunt. "He's killed—"

Loomis touched the lettering.

With a snap the other half of the blackboard, a map of the Old World, rolled up into the ceiling. Hunt and the patrolman jumped. But not Loomis. He was ready for anything at this point.

A crunching of glass came from the doorway. A woman's voice:

"Dr. Loomis?"

It was a nurse from the clinic at Smith's Grove. She had been with him in the car. Last night.

Marion, he thought her name was.

"I have to talk to you," she said.

He was instantly ashamed. Why had she come here? To assign blame for the escape? Go back to your patients, he thought, and leave me to do the rest of what must be done. Help those who want to be helped.

"I didn't recognize you," he said. His eyes narrowed. "What are you

doing here?”

Marion avoided the policemen. Her eyes were fixed and watery, as if she, too, had not slept since. Her eyes would not release him. “Privately,” she said.

He led her into the school corridor and lit a cigarette for her there next to the lockers. Farther along the corridor a janitor operated a vacuum cleaner—no, it was not a vacuum cleaner, it was a floor waxer—oblivious to what had gone on. Better get in there and whisk away the blood, he thought. Make everything ready for another happy day at school. But be sure to bring everything you’ve got. It will take more than wax to disinfect this place of the evil that has walked here. He left his mark in stains you may never be rid of.

She blew a cone of smoke at a hall fire alarm box and fixed him with her unyielding eyes. “Dr. Rogers sent me down here. He’s extremely concerned about you.”

The janitor sniffed at the surprising scent of cigarette smoke on the school grounds, shrugged and resumed his work.

“I’m not the one to be concerned about.”

“I’m afraid he doesn’t agree with you. You’ve been ordered back to Smith’s Grove.”

“Ordered?” Loomis smiled mirthlessly. “He can’t order me.”

“No, no, but the Governor can. He spoke to Dr. Rogers personally a few hours—”

“The Governor! Well, well.” They’re bringing out the big guns, he thought. They wouldn’t listen to me when it could have made a difference. And now they’re trying to stop me from cleaning up their mess for them.

The nurse was not amused. “Dr. Loomis, this thing is all over the state. Your patient escapes once, murders three teenagers, you shoot him with a gun and he escapes again.”

That about summed it up. Loomis fingered the lighter, Hunt’s lighter. It was useless. He didn’t have any more cigarettes, and he surely was not going to ask this messenger girl for one. His skin was prickling with anger. He tried to hold his blood pressure under control.

He could not avoid saying, “If someone had listened to me earlier . . .”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

So say we all, thought Loomis.

“But Dr. Rogers is afraid this could jeopardize our whole rehabilitation program. He doesn’t want anyone from the Mental Health Department anywhere near Haddonfield.”

“Why’d he send you down here, then?”

“In case you’d already found him. Alive.”

“Tell Dr. Rogers—tell him you couldn’t find me. Tell him anything. I can’t leave Haddonfield now.”

Marion finally broke her gaze guiltily. “Sam, I’m afraid you don’t have a choice. There’s a Marshal waiting for you outside.”

Laurie felt the wind ruffling her eyelashes as a bleached white sky rushed by overhead. She put her hand out and cupped the air currents. It was like flying.

A man’s voice said, “I told you we shouldn’t have brought her.”

She was suddenly afraid beyond all reason that she had done something terribly wrong. But she could not figure out what it was. She folded her hands in her lap, over her white nightgown with the little blue flowers. She hung her head.

“Please don’t fight,” she said.

The sky continued to fly by outside.

“He saw her,” said the man. “He saw her!”

“Who was it, Mom?” asked Laurie. “Why don’t you tell me? Why won’t you ever tell me anything?”

In the front seat of the car, Laurie’s mother turned around. “I told you,” she said. “I’m not—”

“But he saw her!” said the man, who was Laurie’s father. He was much younger than she remembered. Handsome.

“Don’t,” said Laurie. She was certain now that it was somehow magically her fault. She placed her hands over her ears. “Don’t fight, Mom!”

“I told you,” said the woman, changing subtly. It was her mother but—

Laurie clutched her doll tighter.

“I told you *I’m not your mother!”*

Her doll’s eyes were closed, rust-stained in the corners.

“Mikey,” she whispered. “It’s okay, Mikey. Don’t cry.”

The car jolted. The doll’s eyes popped open.

Laurie whimpered.

“Laurie,” said another voice. It was near and far away at the same time, in front of her and behind her and above her.

Her eyelids fluttered, trying to wake up. They were stuck together.

“Hey, Laurie. You don’t know me very well. But I just wanted to let you know that I’m not going to let anything happen to you, okay?

Promise."

Her eyelids unsealed stickily.

There was no more sunshine. Only moonlight, blue as the barrel of the gun in the shaking hands of that short, bald man a while ago when it happened. She could still see it.

"Laurie?" came the voice again. It was that boy's voice. Jimmy's. She could hear him but not see him. Where was he? She strained to control her head. It sank deeper into the pillow like a stone.

She collected breath in her lungs to speak. The air slipped back out. She couldn't hold it. In, out.

Tell Annie, she wanted him to know. And Lynda. They were right and I was wrong. I know that now. Will you do that for me? Of course you will. You'd do anything for me, wouldn't you, Jimmy? Tell Annie and Lynda they can come in when they're ready. Are they ready now? Are they in the hospital? Or did they get hurt, too? Are they in the room next to mine? I want to know! I love them both. They're my best friends. I want to—

Then she remembered.

Annie. Lynda.

They were dead.

Dead and never coming back.

She would never see them. Now she would never be able to tell them anything, ever again.

Unseen by Jimmy, a quick tear ran from her eye along a silvery track on her cheek and buried itself in her pillow.

Her chest contracted. The sob never came. Her breath went out. In, out. Out. Out.

Her skin tingled and everything was blue and then white as she began to lose consciousness. Her eyes remained open. She was not even able to blink them. They began to burn . . .

"Laurie?" said Jimmy. "Can you hear me? Are you all right?"

His fingertips touched her face. It was the lightest touch she had ever known. She was almost able to feel it.

He reached for her wrist, her pulse.

"Shit!" said Jimmy.

He dashed out of the room so fast he knocked over a chair. The door whispered shut on Laurie Strode's room like enormous wings folding over her.

THE
HARVESTING

CHAPTER

Ten

Jimmy sprinted out of the room and down to the nurses' station.

Jill was very small and alone at the desk. Around her it was dark. The uncertain jack-o'-lantern cast a feeble circle around her. She was talking on the phone.

She looked up from behind the black carapace of the mouthpiece, her eyes wide and round as the pumpkin pin on her lapel.

"Jimmy, what . . . ?"

"Something's wrong with Laurie! I can barely feel her pulse. I think they gave her too much Diazepam."

"I'll call you back," she said into the phone. "Stay where you are, Jan. I may need you."

"You mean the phones are working again?"

"Sort of." She dialed.

"Get Dr. Mixter!"

"I'm trying. He doesn't answer. He must be sleeping it off."

Together they hurried to Laurie's room.

In the blue darkness Jill felt for a pulse, then lifted Laurie's eyelids. She held her penlight over the pupils.

Jill tensed. She was all nervous angles and bones as her professional training took over. "Looks like an anaphyllatic reaction. She may need adrenalin."

"Where is everybody? God damn them!"

"Take it easy, Jimmy. She'll be okay. All I need is authorization from Mrs. Alves or Dr. Mixter. I'll send Janet. She'll find them—even if they're both sleeping it off together."

It was not normal.

True, the hospital was small and activity was usually at a minimum at this hour of the night. But even in the darkest hours before dawn, a few of the skeleton staff could usually be found chatting in twos or threes at the oases of the nurses' station in each wing, standing on one foot and then the other in front of the elevators, or lounging in the staff cafeteria.

But now, tonight, the darkness seemed to have taken over.

With the lighting still at half-power, scrubbed hallways pointed like tunnels deeper and deeper into recesses of the complex with no safe, lighted desks at the end, no promising flurries of conversation around each intersection and only the unblinking eye of an occasional, very occasional patient call light over a doorway to break the monotony of blocks of sickrooms and sleeping wards.

Pale green walls fell away into shadow at unexpected intervals every few feet beneath blacked-out fixtures, so that doorways and drinking fountains took on the ominous appearance of unexplored waystations marking entrance into the unknown. Corridors intersected in near-darkness, the passages and byways of an unfamiliar geography. A water cooler hummed, chilling downdrafts of air into frost across the floor. Signal bells chimed their blue tones as if muffled by great pressure. Storage cabinets and janitorial closet doors stood noticeably ajar, the cracks widening when passed, as if pails of darkness inside were running out to cloud the institution with ink from an enormous aquifer rising up from the depths of the earth below.

Now Haddonfield Memorial was a place where the few remaining staff passed their hours on the edges of their chairs with backs to the walls and telephones close at hand; where patients lay unmoving in their sarcophagus beds, unwilling to venture even to the bathrooms; and where a young nurse in candy stripes, alone on an errand, might find herself hurrying on her way faster than ever before, eyes downcast, never leaving her feet, hands clenched in her pockets so as not to find her knuckles sinking into the walls which pressed so close at her sides.

None too soon, Janet arrived at the door to the security center.

She touched the knob tentatively. Instantly she snatched her hand away, as if she had made contact with the vibrating plasma separating her from the secret chambers of an underworld.

"Mrs. Alves? Are—are you in there?"

The only response was a high-pitched whine.

"Mr. Garrett?"

She pressed her face near to the door, almost touching it.

"Is *anyone* there?"

No answer. Only the high-frequency oscillation.

She swallowed. "This is ridiculous," she said. "They have to be somewhere."

She put her shoulder to the door.

It swung open slowly, as if against a viscous pressure.

The security center was unmanned. Rows of video monitors like lidless subaquatic eyes peered back at her. The high-frequency whine was louder.

"Mr. Garrett, this is an emergency! I have to find Mrs. Alves immediately. Have you seen—?"

A shape passed across one of the screens.

Could it be Mrs. Alves?

No, it was too tall. Straight legs, walking slowly. Dr. Mixter, then?

She entered the room and approached the monitor.

The shape was moving away from the camera, which was set high in a corner of a corridor, so that it would appear to shrink and devolve into darkness as the perspective increased.

This shape, however, did not lose size.

"Who is *that?"* she muttered. He had to be tall, the tallest man in the hospital. She had never seen anyone so tall.

She stepped back to catch him coming into range on the next screen.

Her foot touched something.

A hat. Mr. Garrett's hat. Why should he leave his hat on the floor like that?

And was that an open door to the storage rooms in back?

"Mr. Garrett?"

She crossed the room and entered a narrow passageway.

A storage closet stood open.

Its lock was broken, just as Mr. Garrett had reported.

She moved closer.

The end of a flashlight rolled out from under a cabinet. Its bulb was still on, though weakly, and as the flashlight rolled back and forth in a half-circle its yellow beam lapped at her ankles, sending long shadows across the floor behind her.

Her eyes followed the beam.

Each time it tolled it illuminated less of her ankles and more of another object. Large. Round, like a caved-in soccer ball. Lying in an expansive, amoeba-like puddle . . .

The handle of Mr. Garrett's claw hammer protruded from the ball. Even in the yellow light it was discolored. At first it seemed to be moving, but that was only the rocking of the light.

Janet bent over it.

Mr. Garrett's body was sprawled face-down where he had fallen amid an expanding puddle of darkness. The claw of the hammer was

embedded in what had been his cranium. The darkness had flowed out of him, surrounding his head in a thickening blot before it stopped spurting, grew cold and began to congeal.

Janet shrieked.

She tore out of the room and down the hall, her face melting.

“Help! It’s Mr. Garrett! Someone, please! Anyone! *Help me now!”*

No answer. Only the uneven blotches of the walls rushing past her, the windows of the wards dark as hollow eye sockets.

“A phone! Oh, please . . . Dr. Mixter, yes!” Ahead, the doctor’s office.

A green ribbon of light from a desk lamp shining under the door.

Janet darted inside and threw the bolt.

“Dr. Mixter, please hurry! I need you! First Laurie Strode—we couldn’t find her pulse, and then . . . oh, doctor, you’ve got to hurry! There’s been a terrible—”

Empty office.

Except for the steam that was rising under the door to the inner study.

The sound of running water.

She crossed the outer office and threw open the door.

The bathroom was open, awash in red steam under the infrared heat lamps. The shower was running full blast. Water rich as blood spread across the floor toward her feet.

She stepped back, her hands to her face, hysterical.

To the side, adjoining the bathroom, a chair. Clothes, shoes, socks draped over it. Beyond that a desk. Another chair, a swivel chair—

Dr. Mixter, back to her, his skin pale and green in the light from his aquarium. Within the tank the model of a diver hung suspended by an air line over a little plastic treasure chest. Each time the diver leaned forward a stream of bubbles was released from under the lid, striking his face mask and knocking him upright again. The effect was serene at first glance. Then an insane-looking eel came poking out from behind a lava rock, its beady eyes a crenelated orange in the ultraviolet. Dr. Mixter seemed to be deep in meditation, transfixed before this submerged seascape.

Janet averted her eyes and came up to the desk.

“Excuse me, Dr. Mixter. I—I’m sorry, but you’ve got to help. There’s been a terrible—Dr. Mixter?”

Impulsively she leaned across the desk, touched his bare shoulder with one finger. The chair rotated.

Dr. Mixter turned to face her. He had not fallen asleep. One eye was

open. The other—

A hypodermic needle was stuck several inches into the center of his right eyeball.

Janet flew backwards from the sight, and straight into a pair of powerful, waiting arms.

One huge hand gagged her mouth. One huge hand obstructed her eyes. A blur of plastic. A scarred thumb flipped the cap off a fresh needle. Forced the plunger back. Loading it with air.

Janet kicked until her shoes fell off. Her scream was gurgling, like a scream from deep underwater.

The needle swooped in front of her. Her eyes contorted shut. Time stopped. She opened them. The needle had moved out of range.

She tried to twist aside.

The long needle drove all the way into her temple.

Her eyes bulged and rolled white.

When the twitching subsided and she hung limp in his arms, the tall shape released her. She dropped like a heavy doll.

The shape stood there for a moment while another round of bubbles was released from within the aquarium grotto. The humming of the air pump blended with the hissing of steam from the shower as its terrible featureless mask tilted over her without expression, observing curiously.

Then it backed away, disappearing through the mist, and was gone.

Out into the hall, to finish its rounds.

Laurie had gotten her wish. Miraculously, she was on her own in the hospital. Only it wasn't the same; it wasn't Haddonfield. There were windows with bars on them.

Why should there be bars? she wondered. To keep people out? Or to keep them in?

She didn't know which question bothered her more.

She tested a door, but it was locked.

People passed her in the corridor. Big people in white gowns and slippers. They don't get to keep their own clothes in here, she thought. But I do. I'm only visiting. She smoothed her new blue dress proudly and looked up into the faces. But their eyes could not find her.

They were talking, but not to her. Not even to each other. They were talking to themselves. I do that sometimes, when I'm afraid. I never knew grownups do that, too.

These were grownups, all right. But *different* grownups. Not like Mom and Daddy. They were more like children. Only so big! She

clasped her dolly closer and kept walking. Well, I won't talk to them, either. So there.

They were sleepwalking, she decided, the way someone used to at home. She could barely remember. It had been like a ghostly passing in the night outside her bedroom door, feet padding the hall, never satisfied. He never slept, she thought. I can almost remember what he looked like. His cold blue eyes like chips of ice. Like their eyes? she wondered. She looked up again, trying to hold the eyes of the tall, very tall people passing her in the corridor. But she could not see them now; the sunlight through the high windows coruscated around their heads, flaring out their features.

Do they have trouble sleeping, too? That must be why we had to come here today, to find out how to help him go to sleep. Only—he hasn't been home for such a long time. Since I was a little girl.

She came to another door.

This one opened.

A boy was seated on a stool. He was staring out through the bars, directly into the sun.

Why does he do that? she thought. To get warm?

Mikey did that once. She held up her doll to show him the room. See? My dolly was a bad boy, too. He stared right at the sun for so long one day when I left him outside that his eyes won't work right anymore.

"Hello," she said.

The boy swiveled around on his stool. As if it took no effort for him to do so.

She could not see him clearly. The sun washed out his face, too. But his eyes. His eyes glinted through the flaring sunlight like chips of blue ice.

I don't want to see those eyes, she thought. They scare me!

She drifted through layers of cloudlike sleep. The room, the sunlight, the whiteness all around cushioned her and lifted her . . .

"Why are you asleep, Laurie?"

A woman's voice. Her mother's. She floated toward it.

"We have things to do. You promised me you wouldn't sleep."

She fought to awaken.

She was caught and supported by the bed, the sheets, the cool darkness. She tried to sit up. She couldn't. She struggled to move her leg but it hurt.

I'll make a sign, she thought, to let them know that I hear.

She wanted to move an arm, a hand, a finger. It was useless.

“Christ,” said a voice, very close by. A real voice this time. Was it Jimmy’s voice? “I can’t believe this! Where the hell is he?”

“He’ll be here.”

“This is ridiculous! I’m gonna go find Mrs. Alves myself.”

Laurie heard footsteps leaving her room. She felt them, too, throbbing in her head. She battled to open her eyes, to sit up. Are they leaving me?

But it was too late. They were out in the hall.

She forced her abdominal muscles to contract and her good left arm to lift her.

She swooned there away from her pillow, about to fall back. But she was out of the dream at last. She had come out of it, and her eyes were open.

Jimmy let the door to Laurie’s room close and followed Jill to the desk.

“This is like some kind of a nightmare,” he said.

Jill made a brave attempt to laugh it off. “Oh, don’t make it sound so dramatic. This is a hospital. We help people, make them well. That’s our business. All Laurie needs right now is a quick visit from Dr. Mixter or Mrs. Alves, so she can have an injection as a precaution. There’s no hurry. She’s coming out of it fine on her own. I’ll admit I was worried there for a minute when I couldn’t find her pulse, but she’s breathing okay again—you saw her. She’s out of danger. That girl in there is very tough. She inherited a real strong constitution from someone.”

“Why am I having such a hard time believing you?”

Jimmy was right. There was a tightness in Jill’s throat, and the tendons of her neck stood out when she spoke. She had experience at controlling herself, which was the only thing left for her to control now, but at the moment she was doing only a moderately good job of it.

“Like I said, I’m going for Mrs. Alves and the doctor, anyway. You stay here. Wait in there with her, if you can.”

“Janet’s got to be on her way back,” said Jill, “with all the help we’ll need. But—” and here her face grew taut, giving her away, “—but if you want to, well, good luck.”

Jimmy was on his way. “I’ll find out. There’s got to be somebody else alive in this whole place. It can’t be just us.”

“No,” said Jill after he had gone, “it can’t be. Don’t be silly, Jimmy. That wouldn’t make sense.”

She fidgeted behind her desk. She looked ready to bolt herself. The only sound was the liquid guttering of the pumpkin on her desk. That

and her own shallow breathing.

Behind her, on the other side of the counter, a shape moved across one video monitor screen, off the screen, and into another corridor.

It was not Jimmy.

It was coming this way.

The man with the pointed hat led Loomis to a yellow car with the state emblem on the door.

Marion, the state psychiatric worker, opened the door and waited for him, shame-faced.

Hunt stood there smoking another cigarette, In another part of the city a cacophony of sirens raced the dark streets.

Loomis dug in the pocket of his trenchcoat. “Your lighter,” he said.

“Keep it.” Hunt alone met Loomis’ eyes. “We’ll find him,” he said simply. It was neither a boast nor a promise; it was for him a commentary on what was to be. There could be no other outcome. If there were, his job would mean nothing.

Loomis locked eyes with him. “Where are you going to look?”

“I don’t know,” said Hunt honestly. But that detail did not change the conclusion for him. He did not flinch from Loomis’ stare.

There must be something more I can tell him, thought Loomis, some betraying detail about what to expect next. But Michael Myers is too single-minded for an elaborate strategy. He waits. He does not speak. He moves and acts when the black spirit within him tells him it is time, and not before. He does not think. You can’t stop him in the usual ways. Nobody ever stopped him and nobody ever will stop him, unless they understand what he is. I am the only one who understands. And I can’t tell you. Some things are too fierce for words.

“Neither do I,” said Loomis, and got into the car.

Good luck. May God help us all.

Hunt watched them go. Over his chest, the red light from his own car parked at the curb reflected rhythmically in his badge. He became only a small figure alone on the sidewalk of the elementary school, and then the trees closed in front of him and there was only the night and the sound of the state car gearing up and out of town.

It was late. Once, thought Loomis in the car, there might have been time.

“You didn’t believe me, did you?”

“I’m sorry,” was all Marion could say.

The driver in the front seat said nothing.

“Don’t feel sorry for me. Feel sorry for that little town back there.

Be years before they forget this."

"Dr. Loomis, I think there's something else you should know."

The car passed the town square. A few reckless teenagers were still congregating. There was the sign pointing directions to Haddonfield Memorial. Loomis felt ill.

It did not matter what this woman thought.

It did not matter what anyone thought now. It was too late.

But his mind would not put it away. His jaw worked and the words continued to come. It was the only thing left for him. Useless words.

Let it out, he thought. Perhaps a small part of it will get through, enough for them to assess responsibility accurately tomorrow and for the rest of their lives.

"Did you see the blackboard back there at the elementary school?"

"Yes."

"In order to appease the gods, the Druid priests held fire rituals. Prisoners of war, criminals, the insane, animals were burned alive in baskets. In the spring it was called Beltane, in the fall that word you saw back there, Samhain. By observing the way they died, the Druids believed they could see omens of the future."

The marshal observed Loomis suspiciously in the rearview mirror.

Marion's eyes were wandering, embarrassed.

She thinks I'm mad, he thought.

Let her think what she likes.

He went on.

"Two thousand years later we've come no further. Samhain isn't evil spirits. It isn't goblins, ghosts or witches." And here perhaps was a handle a psychiatric nurse could latch onto, if she had the courage. "It's the unconscious mind. We're all afraid of the dark inside ourselves."

"Dr. Loomis, listen to me . . ."

But she wasn't listening to him. *She has ears but she does not hear*. Tears filled his eyes. The pointlessness of it all. City lights and children's costumes whipped past the car window, blurring until they were abstractions into which he or anyone else could read anything they liked. Anything that was within themselves. It didn't matter how you interpreted it. Utimately it would come down to the same thing. The absence of light, which was the darkness carried within an entire race.

"Dr. Loomis, there's a file on Michael Myers that nobody knew about."

Why was she lowering her voice? Was this a professional

consultation? What did it matter now?

“I’ve seen everything.”

“No. It was hidden, sealed by the court after his parents were killed. Then, after the Governor heard what happened tonight, he authorized Dr. Rogers to open it.”

“What file?”

“It isn’t fair.” She went on in a whisper, wary even of the marshal. “They should have allowed you to examine everything. That girl, that Strode girl—that’s Michael Myers’ *sister!”* She took a quavering breath. “She was born two years before he was committed. Two years after, their parents died in an automobile accident and she was adopted by the Strodes. They requested that the records be sealed in order to protect the family.”

Loomis’ eyes cleared and his spine went ramrod-straight.

“Jesus, don’t you see what he’s doing here in Haddonfield? He killed one sister fifteen years ago—now he’s trying to kill the other!”

He realized in a flash that he had been waiting all along for the other shoe to drop. And now he had it, the last piece of the warped jigsaw that was his—and Michael Myers’—life.

How could I not have seen it?

Now I have the last weapon I need. The truth. My cup runneth over.

“Tonight, after I shot him. Where did they take her?”

“The Clinic,” said Marion.

“The Clinic! Where—?” He grabbed the back of the front seat and said directly into the marshal’s ear, “Do you know this area well?”

“A little bit,” said the marshal noncommittally.

“Where is the Clinic located?”

Marion touched his shoulder. “Dr. Loomis, we’re under orders from the Governor!”

“It’s the hospital back on Route 17,” offered the marshal, “about three miles.”

“Turn this car around. Now.”

The marshal smirked. “I can’t do that. I’ve got orders.”

“Those orders just changed!”

“Dr. Loomis . . . !”

Loomis pushed her back in the seat.

“Doctor, you’re getting yourself into a lot of trouble . . .”

Loomis whipped the magnum revolver out of his pocket and waved it savagely. “What is it you fellows usually do? Fire a warning shot, right?”

The marshal reached back, as if to take a toy from a child. He was still smirking.

Loomis pointed the barrel at the side window and pulled the trigger.

There was a deafening roar.

The marshal's jaw dropped open.

Less than a second later the car was skidding onto the shoulder.

"Now," said Loomis. He eased the smoking muzzle up against the driver's medulla. It fit perfectly. "Hand your gun back here. And turn this car the hell around. And then start praying that we're not too late!"

Jill was eyeing the small novelty shrunken head that someone had left on the counter when the buzzer went off.

She almost jumped out of her skin.

"I'm coming," she said, "I'm coming!"

She frowned and picked up the rubber head by its synthetic hair, using two fingers, and dropped it into the waste basket.

"Very funny. Almost as much fun as helping some eighty-year-old guy take a whiz."

The buzzer sound again.

"Hold onto your rectum, grandpa," she said, "I'll be there in a minute . . ."

She left the desk and headed past Laurie's room.

She pushed open a door and disappeared into the darkness beneath a yellow emergency light.

As a shape bled off the edge of one of the TV monitors and into the corridor.

The shape's hand was cuffed around something bright.

A bent scalpel.

Jill remained inside the patient's room. The yellow light over that door clicked off and the corridor was drab once more.

Through the glass in the door to Laurie's room, a white mound was clearly visible in the moonlight on the bed. A long, resting outline. The contour of a sleeping body.

The tall, dark shape entered Laurie's room without a sound.

The white form on the bed did not move. Perhaps it was asleep.

The door clamped shut.

The corridor was silent, except for the faint trickling of refrigeration from within the soft drink machine at the end of the hall, the sizzling of the pumpkin over on the desk, and the friendly joking and cajoling

of Jill's voice from the next room.

A silver scalpel swooped through the air over Laurie's bed.

It rose and fell once, twice, three times, its blade stabbing deep, each blow buried to the hilt in the bedclothes.

The form on the bed could not have had time to cry out.

The cutting blows made no sound at all.

CHAPTER

Eleven

Was there someone outside?

“Finally,” said Jill.

The old man was resting again. She opened the door and hurried out.

Laurie’s door was just now winding shut.

Was that the sound of dragging feet at the end of the corridor?

Jill ignored it and ducked immediately into Laurie’s room.

“Dr. Mixter? Mrs. Alves? Did Jimmy tell—?”

Laurie’s bed was ripped apart. Sheets were scattered on the floor.

There was no one in the room.

She checked the bathroom. Empty.

Then she noticed what had happened to the bed. The pillows. They were rearranged down the middle of the mattress in a crude approximation of a human form.

They had been—what? Cut open? Yes. The pillowcases were slashed to ribbons. Feathers were everywhere.

The first snow of winter had come to Haddonfield.

Jill ran to the desk. She rang every number she could think of. There was no answer.

She could not get an outside line.

“Jimmy,” she said, “oh Jimmy, where did you go.”

She was halfway back down the hall when the phone rang.

She came close to ignoring it.

“Jill? I still can’t find Mrs. Alves What did Dr. Mixter say?”

“I don’t know, Jimmy. He’s still not here. Listen—”

“How’s Laurie doing? Any change?”

“That’s just it! She’s not here! She’s gone!”

A moment of stunned silence.

“Jimmy, something really weird is going on. I went to her room and —and now I can’t find her! I—”

“That’s impossible!”

“I know. I don’t understand it, either. She must have come to while

I was in Mr. Cornfort's room."

"We've got to find her. We've got to! You take the east wing. I'll meet you in the lounge in five minutes. And see if you can dig up Garrett while you're at it!"

* * *

On a closed-circuit TV screen which no one was watching, a gray figure crouched in a hall.

The figure's right hand and foot were bandaged. As it crawled forward on hands and knees the bandages unrolled across the linoleum like antennae.

Had the TV monitor been equipped for it, there would have been a delicate whisking sound.

And a rasping of breath in and out of a dry throat.

Nothing else.

A zoom-in would have revealed her lips moving to form words. Words that were thoughts. Thoughts without sound.

She was thinking, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to see you. I tried to forget, just like they told me to. I honestly did. I thought I had till now. Except for the dreams. I even tried to stop them. But I couldn't.

You have been with me all along, no matter what, haven't you?

Like in the middle of winter, when the days were short and the hours turned so slowly. There was nothing to do except play inside and then go to bed early. Was it like that for you, too, where you were?

They said you were safe. I heard them say that through the door at the end of the upstairs hall. Do you remember that hall, with the floor furnace and the grate that creaked as if it would collapse if you walked on it? I asked them about you exactly twice. I remember; each time I was whipped for the only times in my life and told not to speak of you again. And I never did. I couldn't speak at all sometimes. Not unless I made absolutely sure that somewhere in the back of my mind I was not thinking of you, that your name could not possibly pass my lips.

It never did.

I made sure not to let myself talk when the memory of you crossed my mind like a shadow. At those times I couldn't talk at all, because I was sure that if I did I would be punished and die. Father beat me that badly, did you know that? Would you have cared?

No.

And now you are here, with me again, inside of me and outside of

me, and my throat is stopped. For that I should at least be grateful. Because if I were to speak out now, I *would* be punished, wouldn't I? Punished so severely I would die.

By you, Michael, by you.

It was always you. They punished me in your name, though they never said so. They were your protectors and your substitutes. They lived in fear, and passed that along to me. In your name.

Did you kill them, too, for speaking out? Or was it really an accident?

I'll bet it happened coming back from seeing you that last time. I remember the day. I was left behind, at the Strodes'. I remember it all now, whether I want to or not. Mr. and Mrs. Strode's love was not enough to block the memory. I thought it was, but it wasn't.

What did you do that day at Smith's Grove, Michael, that could make them so upset they would drive off the road? Daddy was always a good driver. He never drank. At least I don't think he did. Oh, you must have done something.

Did you speak to them?

It would have been the first time.

Or did you keep your perfect silence?

I have kept it too, Michael, as have Mother and Father. You have been our master in exile, in our life and our death. We have all served you better than you or we imagined in our darkest hour . . .

She was crawling on all fours now, like a dog.

She slid to a door. The knob was high, as it had been for her as a child. It was still too high to reach. She strained upward.

The scene grew fuzzy before her, in and out of focus.

I want to scream for help, she thought. But I can't.

They taught me that, Michael. They taught me not to speak when I thought of you. And I can't now, not even to save myself. They taught me better than they knew.

In your name.

It was really you teaching me all those years, wasn't it? So that I would never escape you, not even when my life depends on it. Most especially not then.

But you know something, Michael? You have taught me a more valuable lesson than you intended.

For now there will be no sound, not even a whisper to pass my lips that will help anyone—*not even you*—to find me. You will have to do that on your own.

And I have plenty of experience, Michael. I have fled you in dreams

through the nights and the years in ways you could not know about. I have learned the most secret refuges of my mind, the spaces between waking and sleeping where even you cannot enter. I know where to go inside that you can't get in, not you and not anyone else, the places that are always here when there is no place left to run.

She grasped the doorknob.

It opened.

She dragged herself inside, leaned against the wall, and passed out.

Come and get me, Michael. I dare you.

Trick or treat.

On the next video monitor screen, a shape came walking.

It passed the door behind which Laurie was hiding.

It looked like nothing so much as a character in another horror movie, tall and dark and moving stiffly in a familiar unstoppable rhythm.

And so it was now, one more rerun on the Late, Late, Very Late Show on Halloween night in this particular town, acting out the last reels of its relentless stalking of the heart of the American dream. It was always so. Variations of figures like it had come again and again to towns exactly like this all across the country, and would continue to come in endless variety and profusion whenever the days grew short and the horror of an unburied past returned to haunt the long night of the human soul. They would come to movie theatres and TV screens over and over in untiring replays for as long as people turned away and pretended it was not really there; that very refusal gave it unopposed entrance to their most inner lives. Nothing ever stopped its coming and nothing ever would stop it, not for as long as people deferred the issue of its existence to the realm of fantasy fiction, that elaborate system of popular mythology which provided the essence of its beachhead.

For now, it came on and on.

The shape left one television screen and entered another.

Down another corridor.

To the back of the building.

* * *

Jill appeared on the last monitor. She was moving so fast she left an electron trail across the tube.

She reached the security center, room 25.

"Mr. Garrett?"

She raised her hand to knock, then pushed inside.

"Mr. Garrett, we need you. Where are—?"

From behind her in the hallway, a hand settled on her shoulder.

Jill gasped.

"I'm sorry," said Jimmy. His brow was knitted tight between his eyes and his face muscles were no longer relaxed. "I can't find anybody. Bud's gone, Mrs. Alves is gone . . ."

"So is Mr. Garrett," said Jill.

"What the hell is going on?"

"You're asking me that question?"

"We've got to find Laurie."

"We've got to find somebody."

"All right, look. If you don't find anybody, I want you to get in your car and drive out to the Sheriff's Station and get somebody out here."

Jill nodded, wide-eyed. "Okay."

"I'll keep looking." He left her there.

She rubbed her arms and shivered.

Her transit of the room, around the desk and out the door was accomplished swiftly, with no wasted motions and her eyes impatiently on the exit. Jill left the banked video screens to do their mindless surveillance, useless now that there was no one to observe their scan; she glanced only in passing at their hazy gray-and-white fisheyes. They depicted some of the same desolate interiors she had seen at her own monitors, the dimmed-out interstices of the hospital's once-bright and optimistic asepsis.

Had someone or something been lurking in the byways of the wings, she would not have known the difference. The images were too dingy to read. For all she knew a drink machine might as easily have been a laundry hamper, a figure in a chair the back of an empty dressing gown, the eye at the end of the hall another camera, staring back through its own circuitry into infinity. She groped in the pocket of her uniform for her keys, and exited to the perimeter of the lot.

It was not that much different on the outside.

The blacktop glittered under a descending fog. The placement of the light poles smudged along indistinct lines, the bulbs at the tops glowing like mushrooms about to spread radioactive spores into a diffused sky. The horizon—and who knew where that began?—was radiant with moonlight.

As she walked, the first car in line gained substance. It was a yellow '57 Chevy. Its tail surfaced like a shark's fin outfitted in chrome.

She hurried on.

A red Mustang, Karen's, top down. She passed its sodden

upholstery, blinking moisture out of her lashes.

"Come on, Bug, where did I put you?"

She noted that her skin was a sickly, infected green under the sodium lights, as though she were in another world. Now her uniform was suddenly pink, with matching shoes; the misting air itself was suffused with an unnatural blush. The aluminum stripping on a car to her left wavered and began to drip the same color, as if bleeding rust.

She paused to get her bearings.

There was the canvas hood of her VW convertible. She sighed gratefully and separated her keys.

She unlocked the driver's door and slid inside.

An electronic whine reminded her that the door was not closed.

She slammed it and pressed down the button.

She inserted her key in the scratched ignition slot and twisted.

The starter ground once and quit.

"Oh no . . ."

She bounced her head against the seat in frustration. The windows were steaming up from her breath. She rolled down the window and stuck her head out.

"Hey, anybody! Is anybody out there?"

No answer. Only the steady, soft light. She turned her head.

The back window was occluded vinyl, almost impenetrable. As a result the space behind her seat fell away sharply into darkness.

She leaned forward, away from it, keyed the ignition again and again. Nothing. Only a clicking. She climbed out.

"What am I supposed to do now, Jimmy?" The soft, pink haze enfolded her.

Now her footsteps were muted. Was the mist beginning to absorb sound?

She looked down.

A sticky tendril of dark liquid was flowing out from under her VW.

She dropped to her knees and examined the underside of her car.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

"I don't believe this," she said. "I should have junked you a long time ago. I never should have let John talk me into buying you in the first place."

She kicked the tire.

And hurt her foot.

That was because the tire was flat, pinched down to the rim.

Instinctively she checked the other tires.

They were all flat as popped balloons.

“Thanks, kids,” she said. “Trick or treat yourselves, you little bastards!”

She hovered, disoriented. The building was somewhere back there . . . she identified the sharp fin of the Chevy.

As she made her way back, she discovered that the Chevy and the Mustang—and, as far as she could see, every other car in the parking lot—were sitting low to the ground on slashed, totally flat tires.

“Jimmy,” she said, “you didn’t tell me about this part . . .”

She hugged her arms, very much alone.

Without any firm sense of direction, she began running.

Laurie woke up.

She was sitting upright against a wall in a bare room. A few feet away was a telephone on a table. The door to the hall was wide open.

She had forgotten to close it.

Footsteps were coming. Heavy, very heavy footsteps.

She grabbed her knees and huddled in the corner.

I’ll lie very still, she thought, and pull the covers over my head, I won’t make a sound and I won’t breathe and no one will know I’m here, there will be no bogy man under the bed or in the closet or in that dark corner or coming up the stairs one step at a time . . .

She remembered where she was.

Don’t slip back, she told herself. You’re grown up now, yes, you are, and there’s no one to help you anymore, they’re gone, gone away and never coming back. It’s up to you!

But what can I do?

Her eyes searched the floor.

There was a length of bandage unrolled several yards from her foot. Back along the wall to the doorway.

The open doorway.

The heavy, heavy steps.

With the greatest care she had ever expended in her life, she reached down and with her fingers began to draw in the tail of the bandage.

The gauze jerked across the floor. Two yards, one yard, a few more inches . . .

She had it.

The shape walked by the open door.

A scalpel swung against its thigh.

Laurie's eyes racked feverishly for any kind of weapon. A pair of scissors. A knitting needle. A coathanger. Anything.

The room was bare.

The footsteps hesitated.

She held her breath until she was sure her heart would burst.

The shape walked on. *Slide-thump. Slide-thump. Slide-thump*.

The footsteps echoed back to her as though in a cave.

She crawled on hands and knees to the table. She took the telephone down. Her head reeled. She pushed buttons. Electronic tones struck a dissonant melody in her ear.

A voice came on the line.

"Hello? What number are you calling, please? Hello?"

Momma, screamed Laurie, he won't die! He won't die, Momma . . . !

But no sound was able to pass her lips.

"Hello?" repeated the voice on the line. A brittle, impersonal operator's voice. "Hello? Hello? Is anyone there?"

On the screen, a shadow-man explored one doorway after another.

Dark jumpsuit, dark curly hair. A namepatch. *Jimmy*.

"Hello?" His voice rising, about to break, like a violin string wound too tight.

No one there.

He picked up the pace.

A sign on the next door: LADIES LOUNGE.

Jimmy knocked.

Nothing.

The hall empty as a sinking ship in both directions. He combed his fingers through his hair and opened the door an inch, two inches.

"Hello?"

He threw a glance inside, moved on. Past a red fire extinguisher. Its beaklike nozzle seemed to rotate as he passed, following his progress. But it was only an illusion of refraction. Wasn't it?

The next door was wider than the others. MAJOR SURGERY. A luminous rectangle of clean light projected through the glass inset, framing Jimmy's pale face. He pressed his eye to the glass and craned his neck.

"Jesus, Joseph and Mary," he said. His chest was heaving.

He went in.

Inside, a patient lay prepared on the table.

Strapped down, legs straight, feet arranged comfortably at the end of the operating pallet. Only someone had forgotten to remove her shoes. And her dress—it was not a starched white operating gown. it was not even white. It was cut like a uniform, but it was not white.

Not anymore.

It was wet and red, red all through, red and painted to the convolutions of her body like a clinging shroud. Her eyes were open, her hands folded over her abdomen in peaceful repose. Her head was positioned perfectly on the pillow. To be certain that she would not move it, her neck had been tied down with a soft catheter tube. Another length of tubing, an intravenous feeder, had been spiked into her arm just inside the slit cuff of her sleeve. Someone had not done a very good job with that part of it, because the veins were bruised dark as a roadmap beneath the skin, and the arm, the entire body had begun to shrink and wrinkle closer to the bones as the blood drained away, drop by thick, warm drop.

Mrs. Alves was losing her color.

Jimmy felt for a pulse at the throat.

The skin was cold as marble.

Jimmy backed off.

He couldn't move fast enough. His feet stuck to the floor. He walked in place as on a treadmill, unable to escape. His feet became heavy. They lifted and fell in slow-motion, trapped in nightmare.

Then his tennis shoes slipped out from under him. When he hit the pool under the table the back of his head struck hard, splashing blood over his face and hands. Blood soaked into his tunic, creeping up the sides of his body in capillary action, dyeing the suit purple and spongy.

The blood from Mrs. Alves' wrist continued to drain drop by thickening drop, feeding the pool that flowed under the table, across the floor, rising. Jimmy's blood now joined that unstemmable tide, running thin and hot from his mouth and ears and the crack in his skull.

Blood was everywhere and spreading, enough of it to flow out into the streets and gutters of the world and soak the earth, drip by horrible drip.

When would it stop?

THE LORD
OF THE DEAD

CHAPTER

Twelve

Laurie saw that the corridor was empty.

How many more were there? It was a maze. And she was lost in it, bumping from wall to wall, trying to find a way out.

The floor was burnished with the circular brushings of a floor polisher; as she stooped low, she was nauseous at the reek of germicidal.

She focused her eyes as best she could. The drugs were wearing off, but a leaden residue remained in her bloodstream, enough to cloud her vision unpredictably, as if she had cataracts.

Now the focus sharpened. She saw an eye watching her from high in the corner.

It was the bug-eyed security camera mounted at the ceiling. It reflected a tiny reduction of herself, a homunculus trapped within its convex surface. As she faltered there, picking a direction, the lens revealed her bowed body rippling up from the floor like a solitary undersea plant. She elevated a hand to block it out, spreading her fingers like the rays in a child's drawing of the sun. She saw the spokes of her fingers radiating like a mandala around the miniature representation of her head.

The watchbird is watching me watch it watch me, she thought.

Why waste the time? she wondered. Turn your attention somewhere else, somewhere where it might do some good. Am I supposed to believe somebody's actually watching this?

The uselessness of it all was too much to bear.

The wound in her shoulder was reopened fully now. Watery blood soaked through her nightgown, crushed rose petals beneath the flowered print. It ached and throbbed with each heartbeat.

She leaned into the wall, slid along the corridor.

The inset windows of each room were glassy eyes observing her route. If this building put all its circuitry together, she thought, its remote-controlled monitors and alarms, maybe it could come up with an answer before it's too late. Because there is no one left here who can do it. For sure not me.

Jimmy, she thought, take care of yourself, wherever you are. This

isn't your problem. No one can help me now. But do a good job with your own life. There's only one of you.

Maybe after this is over . . .

But there was no point in dreaming anymore.

The real test lay before her.

At the junction, she finally spotted the emergency entrance.

There was no one at the desk.

She teetered forward, regained her balance and went toward it.

The reception area was dim as an after-hours bar. Charts and pencils were strewn over the counter. Off to the side she identified the examination room where she had been brought a few hours ago. A supply cupboard hung open, exposing rolls of gauze dressing and a box of Tucks. A clump of thermometers leaned upright in a jar of tincture of green soap like swizzle sticks in crème de menthe.

It was like the end of the world in a movie she had seen once. The movie was called *Is Anybody There?* She had watched it one night while babysitting the Doyle kids. Its premise was that one night everyone in the world suddenly disappeared except for an actress named Susan Penhaligon. Laurie did not know why she thought of such a thing at a time like this, unless it was a nervous reaction to keep herself awake. Well, she told herself, if that's what it takes . . .

She slogged ahead.

I'm not a famous actress, but why do I have the feeling that they're not really gone? How can they be gone? They can't leave their patients, can they?

But, somehow, they had. They sure didn't stick around for my sake; why should they? Nobody ever has.

If they had all gone off-duty, wouldn't they at least tidy up for the late shift? Apparently not. And yet . . .

She had the strong impression that someone was still here, hiding, perhaps up ahead.

She could not think of his name or what he looked like. But she was sure she knew him.

I can almost remember. Not quite.

In fact, she realized, I can't even remember what I'm doing in this place. What was it, an accident?

Maybe I'm suffering from some kind of defensive amnesia.

She tested herself. What's your name? She knew that one. I'm Laurie Strode. I've always been Laurie Strode. My parents are Mr. and Mrs. Strode. I have no brothers or sisters. We have always lived at—

Outside the glass doors, someone approached through the mist.

Instinctively Laurie recoiled.

Drifts of mist billowed on the other side of the glass, collecting to form a head and hands. Nothing else.

Then the door was opening, and Laurie saw that it was a young woman. She was wearing a white uniform which blended with the whiteness outside.

Her name started with a J. *Jill*, that was it. She was good. She was with me when I hurt the most. Yes. It was all right to remember her.

Laurie showed herself.

Jill's eyes grew large. "Laurie!" she said, speaking to someone who had returned from the dead. Her eyes were so wide that Laurie peeked over her shoulder to be sure the nurse was talking to her.

Where were you? Laurie wished to say. Where is everybody? Is anybody—?

The nurse's lips stammered at another question. She was trying to convey too much in too few words.

"Laurie, wait!" was all she could say. "Wait, I've been—"

Laurie allowed the nurse to advance on her. She tilted her head and studied Jill's lips in an attempt to read her meaning. The nurse's gestures were desperate. Laurie wondered if she had been lost outside in the mist and had become hysterical while searching for the way in, just as Laurie had been exhausting every possibility to find a way out.

You don't want to come in here, Laurie thought, but no sounds would come from her throat. I tell you there's something dreadful in this place. I—I can't remember what it is. It must be too awful to put into words. But you should turn around right now and get out. It's—

A tall shape like shadows made real lumbered out of the examination room.

Laurie's eyes bugged out of her head. Her arms and legs began to quake uncontrollably. She opened her mouth to scream a warning. But the darkness that was where the shape's eyes should have been flowed out, an invisible force to freeze her where she stood.

Darkness extruded from the end of the shape's sleeve and collared Jill. *It was real.* Jill saw it now, too. She felt it. Her eyes rolled up and her tongue grew thick in her mouth as her body arched in a last intake of breath.

The darkness at the end of the shape's other sleeve glinted with a light of its own. It was solid, knife-edged.

A blade.

Jill's eyes shut as the scalpel disappeared behind her back. Then there was the most awful sound Laurie had ever heard as Jill's last breath caught in an astonished gasp and then wheezed out slowly,

escaping like wind through reeds.

The shape released her throat, locking her to him by the hand at her back.

The nurse rose an inch, two inches, a foot into the air, impaled like a puppet by the blade at her spine. It was impossible. But it was happening. The shape was lifting her by one hand. By the scalpel.

The shoes slipped off her feet and thumped to the floor. The soles of her feet curled inward in a death contraction. She swayed there, the only sound the stream of her blood pattering onto the tiles.

Then the deadweight gouged free of its skewer and fell down into steaming blood.

Laurie had already half-run, half-fallen backwards most of the length of the corridor.

She let the scene blur out. She flung herself blindly over a stainless steel supply cart. Medicine and pills scattered like rain in a tunnel. She shoved both arms out and sent the cart hurtling behind her. By the time she was at the end and around the juncture, she heard the cart smash into a wall. Then there was only the measured cadence of horribly weighted footfalls coming and coming.

She ran on. She slammed off one wall, another. Soon the ferocity of her own breathing was all there was for her.

She caromed into a steel bar, knocking the breath from her body. She fell on it and could not pass. Her feet skidded in place. Then the bar gave way, the fire door clanged open on a blast of cool air, and she was careening down stone steps.

A landing. Another door, another bar. She hurled her weight on it. Its latch gave.

Footsteps approaching the stairwell above.

She lunged forward.

A blast of hot air gagged her. She raised her head. The air was oppressive with orange light, like the inside of a pumpkin. Deeper, more vivid lights on the other side of the room warned her to stop.

Past the monstrous iron of the hospital's generator, pipes coiled like the constrictions of a blood-red snake, and then green lights that meant safety. She fell across the room toward these lights, dodging valves.

A single clear light beckoned her. She splayed her arms and tripped headlong, embracing it.

Clear light blasted her forehead. She saw the red veination of her own eyelids. She raised her face to it.

The light swung. Back and forth, back and forth. She took in the features of its surface. It was—

One of the security guards, hanged from the pipes in the corner, strung up by the cord of a utility light.

Laurie screamed. Again no sound came out.

The pumping rhythm of the generator, resounding in concrete through the bowels of the earth.

And the sound of the bar on the door across the room, disengaging.

The shape was in the room.

Darkness flowed toward her on heavy feet, covering the distance between the pipes.

She turned, turned again.

But the security guard could not help her. The shape was all but upon her.

Cornered, she scrambled up the pipes next to the body. The connections rose in a nonsensical pattern.

A foot went up, her good foot. Her other followed, wrenching as if breaking. She clung, drowning, her stitched shoulder ripping open to the bone.

A face in the fire window above her. A girl's face.

Her own.

It gave way. At the first thrust of her hands it flapped open. Impossibly she elevated her body up, up—

Below, the footsteps stopped.

A waxy hand closed on her ankle.

She kicked up and in.

She was through the window.

While below, a no-longer-bright scalpel sabered the red air.

Her legs kicked until there was nothing left to kick, and she fell.

More darkness. Boxes toppled around her. She was in the storage room.

Below the red window, a hulking shape pounded the wall on the other side.

Pure adrenalin directed her through this terminal maze.

Green safelights on white bricks. Chained cages.

Footsteps on the other side of the walls, in the walls. She did not know where to turn.

A dark rectangle the size of an upright coffin. It was marked FIRE DOOR—KEEP CLOSED AT ALL TIMES.

It unbolted. A dark hand reached through. She dodged, ran.

Beyond the chain links, a dot of red light on the wall.

An elevator.

She slapped its door, which would not open.

2.
1.
G.
B.

The light was at 2. She beat at the black button.

The light moved down to 1.

The shape swung toward her, knocking jars of chemicals from shelves. Glass crunched and ground to sand under its shoes.

The light descended to G.

The shape lurched wildly, swinging steel.

The door layered open. Laurie plummetted into the elevator and hammered every button.

The door pumped, grinding to shut. But the blade—the rubber door guard was thumping and thumping closed on the blade.

She backstepped, and the elevator's outside loading door slid open behind her on misty darkness.

She collapsed into the parking lot.

The outside elevator door bumped closed.

Run, she thought, run! Before it gets out . . . Don't think! One hand, one leg, up, out—

Through the mist to a yellow '57 Chevy. She slumped into its wet steel sides. The passenger door handle chilled her hand.

She managed to get it open and scrabbled inside. She locked the door and assumed a defensive position on the front floor. Time passed without meaning.

Was *he* coming?

She was sure he must be able to hear her breathing.

She climbed up to eye-level at the dashboard.

The obscured lot. Cars placed far apart like chess pieces in an endgame. A Volvo by the EMERGENCY door.

Nothing moved next to the building.

Then a dark shape passed outside the car like a ship in fog.

She hadn't locked that side! The button—

The driver's door popped open.

A man in dark clothes sank onto the seat.

Jimmy!

She could not say his name.

She tapped his leg.

His head lolled. His mouth fell open, and red drool ran through his teeth.

Finally his eyes found her.

His hands fumbled for the gearshift.

“It’s all right,” he slurred drunkenly. “We’re gon—we’re gonna get outa here . . .”

He aimed his key.

He lost concentration.

“I think,” he said almost unintelligibly, “I think he . . . killed us all . . .”

The key slipped from his fingers and he dropped headfirst onto the steering wheel, as if his strings had been cut. The horn blared.

She sprawled across him, wedging him away from the wheel.

The horn stopped.

Without thinking she sandwiched herself between him and the controls and raked the ignition, feeling for the key.

It was gone.

Her nails skittered the floorboard. She found it! Gripped it with both hands to steady it toward the slot—

And turned it.

The car clicked. And clicked. And clicked. It was dead.

She gave it up. No time. She got the door open and tumbled out onto the pavement. Her shoulder seared with pain, her leg, her ankle.

She dragged her bad leg behind her, standing, falling back. It was no use. She could not run. She could not walk another step. She could not even stand.

From nowhere, powerful lights cut past her through the fog.

Headlights. She waved deliriously.

The car passed. *It did not see her*.

Racing to a stop at the EMERGENCY sign. A woman and two men slammed out and charged the doors.

Laurie crawled after them.

Stop! It’s me! I’m out here! It’s—

They were halfway inside. One was the man in the trenchcoat, the man who had saved her once.

She writhed on her belly until her hands and feet were torn to shreds. But they would not hear. They would not turn. They would not see.

The glass doors shut.

She hauled her body up the fender of a parked car. The Volvo. The

aerial snapped off in her fist.

As around the side of the building, washed in red by the EMERGENCY sign, came the shape.

Behind its inhuman mask, it observed her.

CHAPTER
Thirteen

Loomis thought he heard a car horn blaring like a lighthouse warning as they entered the hospital parking lot. There was no sign of life.

It was a poetic image, but there was no time for any of that now.

The marshal allowed the barrel of Loomis' gun to point him to the EMERGENCY entrance.

"I ought to handcuff you to the wheel," said Loomis, "but I have a feeling I'm going to need you in there. Can I trust you?"

"What have I got to lose, except my job?"

"All right. Let's go."

He led them through the mist to the glass doors. He went in first.

Loomis had the feeling they were entering a tomb.

For all I know, it may already be too late.

"Check the rooms down there." He motioned the marshal into the main hallway. It was surprisingly dark there, the perspective shaded and forced.

The marshal cocked his head.

"Move!"

"Dr. Loomis . . . ?" Marion said.

"Stay with me and shut up!"

A rattling.

Three heads turned to the entrance.

A distorted face and hands red as a surgeon's gloves smeared the door.

It was the Strode girl, no longer catatonic but wriggling in the clutches of unreasoning terror, flattened to the glass by the pressure of uncontrolled panic. Her lips contorted into a soundless scream.

Loomis bounded to the door. He attempted to catch her, but she arched and made a grotesque effort to run. Her eyes, thought Loomis, her eyes!

He set the bolt on the door, then went after her.

"Dr. Loomis, look!"

A dark juggernaut appeared outside.

"It's him!" screamed Marion.

The marshal reached for his empty holster.

Marion took the Strode girl into the hallway.

Loomis stood his ground, solid as a rock.

The shape's cadaverous white mask jutted forward, and then its arms went up.

It walked to the door. The closed door.

Loomis could not tell whether his shot hit the door first, but there was a shattering crash as the glass broke in a hail of bright nuggets.

The shape walked through the door.

Loomis took steady aim.

Another shot.

The shape was hit dead on. Loomis saw the hole burn into the chest, throwing blood as the body took the impact.

It kept coming.

Another shot.

The shape raised its scalpel like a sword.

Another shot. Another.

Its black heart spouted blood. It dropped to its knees.

Why won't you die? thought Loomis. Then he knew.

It had died. Tonight.

How many times in the past?

It was dying now.

It dies, and is reborn. It raises itself from the darkness.

The Lord of the Dead.

For the moment, only for the moment, it was on its knees.

Loomis sighted straight as an arrow and pumped off his last shot.

It blew the shape over backwards. The scalpel remained erect, then fell slowly.

The air rang.

"Don't," said Loomis, as the marshal went to the body.

"He's dead."

"No, he's not! Look at him! He's still breathing!"

Loomis called for Marion. "Miss Chambers, there's a two-way radio in the marshal's car. I want you to go outside, get on that radio and get Hunt!"

She nodded obediently.

"Now wait a minute," objected the marshal. "I'm the only one authorized to use that."

"Move!" shouted Loomis, shoving her around the body.

He found Laurie weaving in the shadows.

“Are you all right?” I should have taken care of her, before, he thought, and not left her to these educated fools. He touched her protectively. “I—I’m sorry I left you.”

She seemed not to comprehend his words. “It’s all right,” he told her.

Laurie’s face tilted, observing him. She shook her head once.

No.

She looked over his shoulder.

As Marion went to the car outside, the marshal bent down to feel Michael Myers’ pulse.

“Get away from him!” warned Loomis.

The marshal turned his back on the body.

“He’s stopped breathing.”

“No!”

Too late.

The shape sat up, scalpel in hand. And slashed the marshal’s jugular with a single blow.

Loomis yanked Laurie behind him.

His gun was empty now!

The shape got to its feet. It grew up from the floor to a new height.

Loomis jerked the girl into a side corridor.

He half-carried her with one arm, running from door to door.

The green letters of an EXIT sign. Across from it, a door that swung wide.

It wouldn’t lock.

Heavy footsteps pounded the floor.

Loomis dragged Laurie through a second, inner door, a wood door with a glass inset. It had a lock.

They were in an operating room, piercingly bright in the center. A silver reflector hung over a surgery table like a bisected moon.

Loomis flung her ahead of him. She staggered to a wall, where she sank down the tiles like a bloody doll. The white tiles were hard-glazed porcelain, seamless.

There was no other door out.

Loomis ransacked the room for a weapon.

Beds, oxygen tents. Towels. Supplies.

No tools.

Footsteps hammered the corridor, entering the outer room of the operating theatre.

Loomis patted himself down. There must be something—!

The marshal's gun. He had taken it in the car. It was still in his coat pocket.

He took Laurie's face in his hands and spoke directly to her, enunciating every syllable so she would understand.

"Not a sound now. Do you understand?"

He felt the smooth, delicate skin of her face, the wisp of down behind her ear, the warm pulsing of her carotid. He noted her cheekbones, the fine line of her nose, her eyes and the intelligence that still lived there. It would stand her in good stead for another sixty or seventy years. If only it could survive.

He saw the broad forehead, the brain that was growing within, the very pores of her skin, each one a miracle in itself.

She looked back into his eyes.

It was as if he was seeing all the generations that had conspired to bring forth this latest and most perfect image of humanity. Everything he had given his life to preserving and nurturing, here in its purest form. The which than which there is no whicher.

She must not die, he thought. *I will not have it.*

He placed the marshal's gun in her hands.

"Here," was all that came out of his mouth. "Use it if you have to."

Behind them, a mighty force pounded the door.

"Don't listen to that," he said. "It's only the dark."

The pounding splintered wood.

Staring back into his eyes, a calm came over her. It was as if he already knew all that she felt, those things which made up the core of her being, the pure flame that burned there and from which she had always drawn sustenance. Now, at this instant, it burned purer and truer for her than ever before.

He was only one person.

That was so much.

She took the gun.

"Thank you," she said.

As the shape splintered through, Loomis hit the light switch.

The room was overrun with darkness.

It stood there in the doorway, illuminated from behind. For a second it hesitated.

Then it moved on Loomis.

He raised his revolver one more time, pointed it at the shape's face, and pulled the trigger.

It clicked, empty.

A bloody scalpel came forward. Without hesitation it hooked into Loomis' stomach.

His eyes opened all the way, as if to a great light. A moment. Then he plunged backwards into a table, spilling useless instruments over the floor.

The shape turned to Laurie.

Strangely calm, she sat where she was and saw it, saw it all.

She searched out its eyes behind the mask. Eyes which would glint like chips of ice if she could find them.

It crossed the room in three steps.

Laurie spoke.

"Michael," she said.

Its head tilted quizzically.

Then it raised the scalpel, and came on.

"Stop," she said clearly.

She lifted the marshal's .38 and fired.

She fired again.

Blood streamed from the eyesockets where she had aimed.

The shape swung the scalpel wildly, blinded. It snicked the air in a wide circle. It could not find her.

Loomis, blood seeping through his fingers, fell upon the oxygen tanks.

She saw what he was doing. She joined him. Together, without a word, they opened the valves.

The hiss of oxygen filled the room.

When it was done Loomis pulled her away and shoved her through the place where the door had been.

"Go," he said. "Now!"

He confronted the shape alone.

The dark figure danced a blind frenzy in the middle of the room.

Loomis went into his pocket one last time. He gripped the lighter, Hunt's lighter, so that it could not slip out of his hands.

There was only blackness beyond comprehension behind the mask.

"It's time, Michael," he said.

That was all.

He struck the lighter.

There was an explosion like the sun.

Outside, in the hallway, Laurie was thrown down by a firecloud.

The last thing she saw was a figure trying to stand upright, walking through the fire, until he was completely consumed by flames.

Epilogue

In the first gray shining of dawn, people descended on the hospital. They came walking slowly from the treelined avenues and side streets of Haddonfield, materializing out of the lingering mist.

They shuffled forward like sleepwalkers.

A patrolman saw them coming and signaled the trucks to finish up. The fire trucks had gone, but two ambulance crews remained.

Then he went to the doorway of the burned-out building.

Hunt was inside, brooding over the gutted rubble.

“Want some coffee?” said the patrolman.

“No, but you can come in.”

“No thanks.”

“What’s the count?” asked Hunt mechanically.

“Ten.” The patrolman’s voice broke from fatigue. “So far.”

They walked out to the car, as Laurie was led to a yellow ambulance. Though heavily bandaged, she was refusing to be carried on the stretcher.

Rumpled news photographers elbowed to get a shot. Men in jacket liners with Portapaks.

“First execution I ever covered,” one of them said to a member of the other ambulance crew, the cleanup detail.

The attendant sealed a body bag and jumped down before closing the doors.

“Whew!” said the reporter. “Don’t that stink, though? Bet you fellas get used to it, huh?”

“Never do,” said the attendant.

“Say. Which one was that?”

“Be damned if I know,” said the attendant “Burnt to a french fry. All I know is, somebody had themselves a real nice cookout last night.”

“I hear there were two of ’em.”

“Only one like this. Other one got blown to kingdom come.”

“So. What do you do now? Dental records, that sort of thing?”

“If anybody cares. You never know. They might just take their choice. It doesn’t much matter. They’re both gone.”

“Right.”

The attendant hauled himself up and into the seat. “Yo,” he said to

the driver.

The door shut.

He rolled the window down.

"I'll tell you, though. If there's another doctor somewhere wants to know, we better do the best we can with what we've got. If you want to know the truth, we haven't found a damn piece of the other guy. One thing's for sure. Even if they do find the pieces, there's no way in hell he's ever gonna get put back together again. You can count on that."

He waved to the reporter and nodded at his driver.

"Let's go."

The reporter wandered back to the other ambulance.

"Can't I ride in front?" Laurie was saying.

"Sorry," said the attendant. She had never seen him before. "I have to put you in back." He opened the doors. "Ready?"

"Okay," she said. He got in with her.

"Okay," he said to his driver.

The ambulance moved out.

Her attendant started filling out a form on a clipboard.

"Who are your parents?" he asked.

"What?"

"I mean, what's their address?"

The ambulance threaded carefully through the scattered walkers on the road out. A gang of four little kids came out of the mist. They looked pale and drawn.

"What?" said Laurie.

"Your address. Where do you live?"

Her face was set and expressionless against the window. She would not lie down. She felt the pain, but she knew she could bear it. She didn't care where they were going.

She took a long time answering. "I don't know," she said. "I really don't."

Then there was only her face framed in the square of safety glass, on its way out into the cool, blurring mist of that great gray, empty morning.